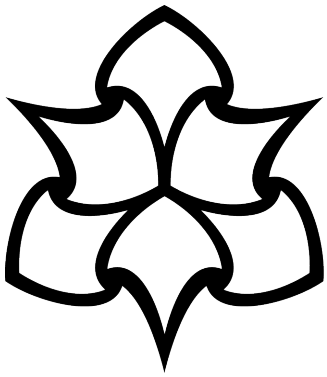

Opening the Wig

Re-shaping the Edges of the Wig and the Photograph

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Opening the Wig
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Abstract

‘Opening the Wig’ is a practice-led research project that includes a written thesis and an exhibition of work that position the wig and the photograph as multi-layered, unstable and relational things. The thesis and practice establish an interlinked theoretical and visual methodology to argue that the materiality of the wig can undermine its function and disrupt the body’s boundaries. A New Materialist framework, drawing on Jane Bennett’s ‘thing power’ and Bill Brown’s ‘Thing Theory’ has been used to demonstrate the relational complexity and porosity of wigs and photographs as objects. The material and conceptual instability demonstrated by the wig is also conveyed in the way I have re-shaped and destabilised the photographic surface.

The research traces the development of my practice through the identification of three core threads. Thread one draws on historical research and Freud’s Uncanny to establish the complexity and instability of the wig in its disembodied state. Thread two relates to the notion that objects, specifically wigs and photographs, when conceptually and visually “thingyfied”, can be seen to demonstrate a vitality beyond their human-object relational conditions. Thread three focuses on the surface as a site for conceptual and material re-shaping. The photographic surface is the site where materiality and image become entangled, and various methods were deployed to manipulate the surface and materiality of the photograph in order to make it palpable, porous and vital. I have found the metaphor of the wig slip a useful visual and conceptual tool in investigating what the wig, itself a kind of surface, reveals and covers up. The addition of edges, holes, gaps, and spaces to the material photograph and the image depicted has created the perception of unstable surfaces that are prone to slippage.

I conclude this research by positioning both wigs and photographs as intertwined porous and relational surfaces. The way that I have cut, layered, folded and re-photographed has resulted in images that obscure the edges

between image and surface and re-shape the photograph as something *made*, not taken. This has implications for the way that we respond to photographs and the images they depict.

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Contents

Introduction

The first appearance of women's wigs in my practice was in a documentary photographic study into the vestiges and detritus left lying around a red-light district in Manchester. I became interested in fallen hairpieces that I regularly found in the street. I felt these were graphic metaphors for what went on in the area; symbols of the underlying violence risked by the women who worked there. They could also represent the evidence of sloughed off remains from women who had shifted from one persona to another. There is a confusion that hangs over abandoned or disembodied wigs: they look organic, even though we know they're not. Separated from their intended context, they have the potential to trigger in us a very deep-seated sense of unease. And yet they are just wigs: inanimate, inert, they pose no danger; but they look like they could, at any moment, come to life.

On a very literal level, a wig could be deemed just a garment, a 'hair hat', (Woodforde, 1971:105) yet, its materials and its usage have a complicated relationship with the boundaries of the body. Wigs have the ability to destabilise the integrity of the body in a way that other things worn on the body do not, they sit somewhere between a garment, and a prosthetic. They are not purely medical, performative or cosmetic, they are all of these things, yet do not quite fit in to any one of these categories. They exist in the space between, which makes them very ontologically fluid. There is a kind of in-betweeness about the wig, particularly in its status as an object. For example, it is a non-human artefact, but it is often made from the detritus of a human body; and made to look like part of the body. And, even before you do anything to (or with) a wig, its use raises questions about authenticity and artificiality. The wig's edges are blurred – it is a boundary transgressor, a liminal thing. Its detachability and the ease with which it can aid the slippage between different appearances for the wearer demonstrates how easily it problematises the edges of the body and the

self, and reveals how fragile the relationship between appearance and identity is as a construct.

Like most objects, a wig is what Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox, in their introduction to ‘Objects and Materials’ would describe as ‘socially entangled’ (2014:11), which means that our understanding of it is shaped by our relations with it. However, I argue that wigs can demonstrate a vitality beyond our relations with them, beyond human/object relational conditions, which makes them an ideal subject to explore photographically. It is from this perspective that I started this PhD research.

Returning to the encounter with which I began this introduction, surveying the debris on the street (which also included shoes, clothing and used condoms), it was the clumps of hair in particular that called out; they demanded attention in their own right. All the objects provoked some kind of emotional affect in me: anxiety and unease at the abject scene, not just from the “out of place” corporeal quality of the objects, but also through the chaotic lack of control hinted at by the loss of so many personal objects in a public street. Yet, it was the hairpieces that stuck in my mind long after the project was completed.

Jane Bennett, whose writing helped me re-evaluate my own encounter with “stuff”, discusses her own similar confrontation with assorted trash (dead rat, bottle top, pollen, stick and glove):

> As I encountered these items. they shimmied back and forth between debris and thing - between, on the one hand, stuff to ignore, except insofar as it betokened human activity (the workman's efforts. the litterer's toss. the rat-poisoner's success), and, on the other hand stuff that commanded attention in its own right, as existents in excess of their association with human meanings, habits, or projects. In the second moment, stuff exhibited its thing-power: it issued a call, even if I did not quite understand what it was saying (Bennett, 2010:4).

The pieces of fallen hair and wigs that I found on the streets of Manchester also issued a call to me, they revealed their particular presence in a way that the other objects did not. This was partly subjective, as it was my own associations and interests in wigs and hairpieces that prompted me to take the photographs;

yet, there was something else; something that kept puzzling me, and made me return to the photographs.

Bennett defines ‘thing-power’ as a kind of agency, it ‘gestures toward the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience’ (Bennett, 2010: xvi). Thing power was activated because of the way the objects were found together, through the ‘contingent tableau’ they presented to her; ‘this assemblage, objects appeared as things, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics’ (Bennett, 2010:5). The tableaux presented by the wigs, twisted and splayed across the wet pavement certainly provoked an effect in me. Despite this, their ‘thing-power’ was more apparent in the resulting photographs [fig.1].

Fig. 1 Sarah Eyre, Untitled Photograph (2012)

The prospect that the wig, in its photographic and physical form, and under certain viewing conditions might contain a perplexing quality to it made it intriguingly unstable as an object. What also became apparent when reflecting on this encounter, was how important the development of specific photographic methods would be in attempting to unravel the complex sense of unease and curiosity that the sight of the wig evoked in me.

My ‘tableaux’ (to continue to use Bennett’s term), also included the flattening effect of the camera, and the photographic fixing of the shadows thrown by the object and my body. These registered in the resulting prints as dark holes cutting through the surface of the wig and the photograph, which added to the sense of mystery about what I was looking at. It was the photograph that made me look twice and be surprised by the things that I saw. It was the wig transformed through photography that fully opened up the possibility of its thing-power to me.

Graham Harman (2018:40) argues that any literal description or understanding of a thing ‘does not give us that thing directly, but only a translation of it’; we do not have access to the inner workings of an object or thing. He continues by arguing that because of this, an ‘indirect or oblique means of access to reality’ – through artistic and imaginative means for example – is no less valid a way of exploring or opening up the surface of a thing, or emphasising its thing power.

As a photographer, I was already interested in things, I frequently scanned the streets on the lookout for objects and materials with associative possibilities. Although, *this* research is based on the notion that objects are far more than their socially and culturally constructed meanings. It is, as Jane Bennett writes, ‘the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience’, that interests me (Bennett, 2010: xvi).

Over the course of this research project my photographic methods changed considerably as my ideas about agency, wigs and the photograph converged. To see an object as having a material agency as Bennett does, is to recognise that this agency is due to the way objects are entangled in relationships with other material things and forces in the world. Objects, non-human and human, are constituted from interrelated materials, bodies and intensities, we are not separate and autonomous. This view of matter implies that everything has porous and permeable edges, and this has informed my approach to photographing the wig.

I started the project understanding that a single photographic capture (typical of documentary photography) had limitations in terms of permeating the surface of the wig to reveal its thing-power, so I developed a range of experimental photographic methods in order to open up this aspect of the wig. I began by re-creating my encounters with hairpieces and wigs (albeit in a more styled way) in the studio, and this led to a body of work, 'Wigs', begun in 2012 [fig 2]. The resulting images reinforced the notion that wigs not only have a strange vitality about them, but can also provoke an involuntary response in a viewer.

'Wigs'[1] was the starting point for this research, which led to the two bodies of work completed for this practice-led PhD: 'Penetralia', discussed in Chapter Two, and 'Copy / Cut / Paste', the focus of Chapter Three. Making a photographic representation of a wig is a way of exploring the wig and the photograph's connections with indexicality, materiality, representation and visibility. Both projects have involved shifting the balance between these aspects in order to photographically "open the wig".

It was not enough to just photograph a wig, as I did in 'Wigs', although that was a useful way to begin to explore the uncanny potential of the wig. I have used photographic methods to suggest that the wig is an unruly thing that can, in certain contexts, reveal and conceal unexpected layers and depths. This is a proposition that shifts the wig away from the social aspects of wig wearing and the rational space of ordinary objects to a more ambiguous and imaginative space where, intertwined with photography, a wig becomes a mysterious and independent 'thing'. Throughout this research I have framed the wig in this in-between state, and attempted to maintain a balance between an imaginative and experimental visual approach in order to reveal the thingliness of the wig, whilst using the thesis to keep the wig as a material and social object in view.

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[1] An early version of 'Wigs' was published in Source Magazine (Spring 2012), Of the Afternoon (2013). Later versions of the project were published by Hunger.tv (2014) and The Skinny (2015). The project has been exhibited by QUAD as part of Format: International Photography Festival, Derby.

The project as a whole focuses on in-betweenness. I propose that the wig is an in-between and contradictory thing with porous boundaries. Through a critical investigation of my photographic methods I argue that the photograph is similarly contradictory and unstable. What I explore is qualities of tangibility; the thingliness of an object is not something that can be easily captured in words and photographs. There is a gap between what we commonly understand a wig to be – its history and its function – and what Bennett calls 'thing-power'. I have developed methods that draw attention to this gap as a way of re-framing how we think about wigs, and photographs.

The way I develop my argument in this thesis is through the proposition that wigs and photographs have many overlaps. The photograph, like the wig, is a complex object, and their material forms belie their complicated natures. I have used the word complex to suggest that wigs and photographs have many social, material and affective layers that interact or 'interfere' (Haraway 1991, cited in Law and Mol, 2002:10) with each other, and us, in different and unexpected ways. In 'The Photography Complex', James Hevia writes that photographs sit within multiple complex networks of social, material and technological relational conditions, meaning that 'the multifaceted phases of the photography complex (of which the printed image is merely a part of the production process) re-main relatively obscure' (Hevia, 2009:80). The wig too, I argue in Chapter One, has a complicated corporeal, social and material history that sets it apart from other objects because of its complex relationship with the body. A photograph can often appear as if it presents a unified surface. In the way that it is apprehended as a visual surface with a material support, a wig does too. Unless, of course, either of them slip: it is the idea of the surface slipping to reveal the concealed complexities embedded in both wigs and photographs that has framed the methods for my photographic work.

Photographic practice is at the core of this research so each chapter is organised around critical reflection on the development of a key body of artistic work. The structure of the thesis is loosely chronological, and as such represents the creative and theoretical twists and turns I have taken during the

progression of the research. Each chapter covers an analysis of relevant theoretical texts and contextual art practice.

During the course of this research three core theoretical and conceptual threads have emerged that have informed my practice outputs; these are woven through all three chapters of the thesis:-

The first thread relates to the complexity and instability of the wig as an object. My practice and the historical and theoretical research that underpins it has informed this understanding of the wig, particularly the way it is able to undermine its function and disrupt the body's boundaries. The wig also blurs and contradicts notions of surface and depth, "on top" and "within", because it is so easily absorbed into the surface of the body, which complicates any notion of continuity between the body's outward appearance and internal character. The material and conceptual instability demonstrated by the wig is also implicated in the photographic surface, particularly in the slippage between its representational function and material qualities. Throughout the thesis I have identified many similarities between the photograph and the wig in terms of their instabilities and this has gone on to inform the final body of work 'Copy / Cut / Paste'. I have drawn to a degree on psychoanalytic theory – in particular Freud's notion of the Uncanny – and on photographic theorists who challenge representational thinking, such as Joanna Zylinska, Kaja Silverman, Elizabeth Edwards and Daniel Rubinstein.

The second thread is the notion that objects – specifically wigs and photographs – when conceptually and visually 'thingyfied', can be seen to demonstrate a vitality beyond their human-object relational conditions. By framing them as things rather than objects, we can glimpse their shifting edges and begin to develop an expanded understanding of how they affect[2] us and

[2] Affect Theory, in very simple terms, is an approach to situations that focus on non-linguistic forces, intensities or affects. Affect, 'is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond

how we might interact with them. The theoretical methodology and practice-led methods I have developed to thingyfy wigs and photographs are based on the New Materialist theories of Jane Bennett, and the 'Thing Theory' of Bill Brown.

The third thread focuses on the surface as a site for conceptual and material re-shaping. The surface is at the intersection between interior and exterior, and can be porous, material and vital; therefore it is an interesting place to situate propositions about agency. Surfaces are often slippery, and I have found the metaphor of the wig slip useful in thinking about what the wig, itself a kind of surface, reveals and covers up; and in turn, the photographic surface – what it depicts, and what it reveals or conceals. The photographic surface is also the site where materiality and image become entangled, and my practice disrupts the more usual organisation of the photographic image by the re-shaping of the photographic surfaces in my work. This conceptual thread is informed by methods used by practitioners such as John Stezaker and Lucas Blalock.

Alongside these three core theoretical strands are a number of motifs that also drive the relationship between the practice and thesis. The notion that objects are porous draws attention to their edges, their uncanny materials. Familiar materials that evoke the animate can produce emotional affects in the viewer and have the ability to conceal and transform aspects of themselves. I also make reference to "interiority" and "depth", both in terms of the wig and the photograph, as a way of referencing the invisible layers and processes that constitute both. The corporeal associations implied by these words are a

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emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension' (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010:1). Affect Theory is another way to enable us to re-position our relationship with 'things' as an encounter (for example, my encounter with wigs, a viewer's encounter with the photograph and the wig in my work). An encounter might imply that the thing which we encounter is not passive, so in this sense there is a similarity between aspects of Affect Theory and New Materialism. Brian Mussami is one of the key thinkers of Affect Theory, he comments that 'To affect and to be affected is to be open to the world, to be active in it and to be patient for its return activity' (Mussami, 2015: ix).

method of destabilising both objects, connoting animated-ness or agency, and recognising that non-human objects also have a body.

My contribution to knowledge is situated in the way that I have developed a specific set of methods that reveal the wig to be an ontologically unstable *thing* capable of exceeding its porous borders. I have also shown the photograph to be unfixed multi-layered and relational. I have established a theoretical and visual methodology that positions them as intertwining and complex objects. I am proposing that it is the methods of photographing, cutting, layering and re-photographing that I use to simultaneously thingyfy the wig and the photograph that provide the context through which we can re-frame our thinking on both. In bringing these two objects together in a myriad of ways through my thesis and practice I argue that I am transforming the relationships they have with each other (and with us) through the merging of different spaces and materialities: analogue and digital; virtual and material; passive and dynamic.

In both my practice and thesis, I have re-positioned photography and wigs (or more accurately, photographs of wigs) in two unexpected ways. Firstly, they are both objects with surface appeal. Photographs and wigs function through their surfaces, which might imply they are concealing nothing *in themselves*, in other words, there is nothing of interest beyond or below their surface. However, as I have suggested through my practice, when these surfaces are cut, folded, or reshaped, then layers, depth and space can be implied. This shifts the photographs of wigs (and the wigs in the photographs) that I make into unstable and mysterious states; they become thing-like because they become *more than* a surface.

This leads me on to the second point, which is that by investigating the potentiality of depths and layers I am implying that these wig and photographic surfaces have a kind of interiority. This is not in order to imply a surface/depth dualism, it is a method I have deployed to suggest that the surfaces of both have substance and vitality, especially when they converge as they do in my final body of work ‘Copy / Cut / Paste’. Through my practice I have got under the skin of the print (and by association the wig) and given them corporeal

overtones. This bodily association evokes in both an uncanny physicality which destabilises our response to them. We may now perceive them as independent forces that have the capability to *look back* and make us feel strange.

Our relationship with wigs and photographs is more complex than might be apparent at a single glace, and both have complicated relationships to the body. In Chapter One I discuss how wigs have an uncanny relationship with the body because they are a material copy of something bodily and are often made from that same bodily material. Photographs too can function as an uncanny copy of a body or object, through their actual or perceived indexical relationship to the body contained in the photograph.

Elizabeth Edwards argues that photographs circulate within complex social and cultural relational systems, and that these relations are further complicated because so many photographs are of people, 'thus blurring the distinction between person and thing, subject and object, photograph and referent in significant ways' (Edwards, 2012:222). This is pertinent to the development of my photographic methods: the way I stage the disembodied wig in my photographs evokes the body; in their embodied upright position in 'Wigs' and 'Copy / Cut / Paste', and in a more visceral context in 'Penetralia'. Thus, these images blur the distinctions that Edwards refers to above, *and* also those between animate and inanimate, rational object and mysterious thing.

The bringing together of the wig and the photograph in my research is an example of a multiplicity (Law and Mol, 2002:11), in the sense that they are coiled round each other, and enmeshed within each other conceptually and visually. I attempt to reveal their thingliness whilst also keeping their objectness in sight, and this suggests that there are simultaneous, multiple modes of being at play. The material and conceptual slippages I am implying through practice and theory transform both objects (wigs and photographs) into things. However, to *only* contemplate the wig and the photograph as a thing is as limiting as only seeing an object in relation to its conventional social functions. Therefore, the different processes I have developed in my practice suggest that thing and object, photograph and wig, surface and depth are all both present and absent

at different points across the body of work. Fragments of photographs, shadows, gaps, edges appear and re-appear in different forms and iterations across the series, reinforcing the notion that the photograph (like the wig) can be fluid, unfixed and malleable.

I am positioning photography, not as a method of *taking* a faithful reproduction of a wig, but as a series of processes that can be unpicked, stretched and re-shaped, and, therefore *made*. Vilém Flusser argues of photographs that 'as objects, their value is negligible; their value lies in the information that they carry loose and open for reproduction on their surface' (Flusser, 1983:56). Of course, this is more complicated, as Joshua Bell argues:

> In the process [of viewing], photographs emerge as relational or *distributed objects* enmeshed within various networks of telling, seeing, and being, which extends beyond what a photograph's surface visually displays and incorporates what is embodied in their materiality (Bell, 2008:124/25).

I argue that rather than taking photographs and wigs at surface value (seeing them as objects that lack layers), framing them through New Materialist theories reveals excess, agency and independence, and re-positions them as unstable, unruly and complex. This can expand the way that we think about them and interact with them. Important to this claim is the notion that the indexical trace, the aspect of the photograph that embodies its surface is material, and therefore pliable. The methods I have developed cut, fold and layer multiple material 'traces' to reshape photographic surfaces. This suggests the subject of the photograph is merged with the making of the photograph, and as such has an active, present, presence.

I am not the only photographer to disrupt and re-shape the spaces of the photograph like this, although I am one of very few photographers to make photographs of wigs in this way. I have been very influenced by the photographic innovations of Lucas Blalock, and the collage work of John Stezaker. However, where my practice differs, and where I situate my contribution to photographic practice, is in the way that my methods are devised specifically to *open* the wig. It is the entwining of method and subject that make

my work different to other experimental practitioners in the field. My practice is not just about transforming the organisation of the photographic surface more generally (although this is a by-product), it is about opening up and fleshing out the surfaces of the wig specifically. I am doing this to re-frame how we think about both. I am destabilising the way we think of a photograph as an object, and how we respond to its surface. The photographic methods I have developed have also destabilised the wig. This in turn may cause us to re-think how we respond to it as an object, and how we respond to it as something that disrupts and merges with the body's boundaries.

My photographic project 'Wigs' was the initial inspiration for this research project and it opened up several lines of enquiry that underpin the subsequent bodies of work discussed in the thesis. In Chapter One I tease out a broad cultural and material history of the wig and wig wearing in Britain in order to establish that we have always had a problematic relationship with the wig. This thesis traces the (Western) history of wigs, their materials and usage in order to understand what it is about the wig that makes it such a powerfully unsettling object. My research shows that wigs, throughout the recorded history of their use, have a complex relationship with the body and its social manifestations. From the early seventeenth century to the late eighteenth century wigs had a well understood function, which was to affirm status, authority, wealth, and profession. However, as my research indicates, this was continually undermined by their physical nature, as wigs were (and still are) made from the hair of other human bodies, animal hair, and nylon.

A wig complicates the boundary between the body and that which is beyond the body through its materials, and also through the way that the addition of another 'layer' in the form of a wig becomes a deceit, and changes 'the bounds of the body' (Festa, 2005:61). This aspect of the wig affects its visibility. One of the differences between wig wearing then and now (or at least in the last hundred years or so) is that wigs were clearly highly visible symbols, they were not intended to be a copy of one's natural hair. The function of wigs changed in the eighteenth century, their use became more cosmetic, and wigs and hairpieces were worn to enhance the natural hair (or replace it when one had none), and

as a result the joins became a lot less visible. Wigs, or 'false' hair became associated with the pressure to project a particular kind of status and power, that of youthfulness, vitality and desirability.

Wigs enable many selves to be staged, so they exaggerate and problematise the distinctions between interior and exterior or self and appearance. Because they are detachable, and so easily absorbed onto the surface of the body they are distrustful, slippery, and can complicate any notion of continuity between the body's outward appearance and internal character. The wig itself can be considered a surface, and in Chapter One I position it as such to introduce the idea of slippage; what a wig slip might reveal or indeed, what it was concealing. The second part of this chapter is concerned with the slippage between the production of representations and the transformation of materials, and the way that materials and representations can be imbued with a degree of animation and vitality depending on the artistic methods used to explore them. Photography creates conditions for both the representation and materiality of the wig to be manipulated to produce different responses.

In Chapter Two I discuss the first competed body of work, 'Penetralia'[3] (exhibited in 2015-16). I moulded and shaped the wig to make it look strange and unfamiliar in the photographs, which was a way of detaching it from its social and cultural associations. My term "thingyfy" was an apt description of the combination of methods and methodology. I have used Bill Brown's definition of a thing (Brown, 2001:5), in combination with Jane Bennett's (2010) 'thing power'. Brown argues, in short, that a thing is an object that has stopped working, an object that has been made strange by being broken (as that is when we notice things – taken from Heidegger's tool theory), or, in my case, an object that has been made strange through artistic methods. I also attempted to thingyfy the photographic surface in order to suggest that the surface of the wig could slip. Even though this might not take on a tangible or physical form, it

[3] Penetralia was exhibited as part of 'Tracing Paper' at Manchester's Paper Gallery (2015) and in 'Semiotic Guerrilla Warfare II' at Dean Clough, Halifax (2016).

opens up the possibility that there is something concealed and, I believe, hidden from our conscious understanding. This body of work directly deployed methods that cut in to and layered photographs (the resulting assemblage was then re-photographed) in order to suggest that a wig might be concealing something unknown underneath its surface.

Photographically my methods shifted, as one, single captured image, even printed, did not convey the wig as a thing that could exceed its boundaries. The methods I developed for the 'Penetralia' series drew attention to the surface of the photograph, because the surface of the photograph depicts the representation of the subject, but conceals the processes and forces, including the indexical trace, that constitute the photograph – its depth if you will. I developed this idea further in the next body of work 'Copy / Cut / Paste'[4].

'Copy / Cut / Paste', represents the culmination of my research, and in Chapter Three I discuss its development. It is where I brought together the wig (this time in its upright form) and the photograph to form a chimeric[5] object (by this I mean the merging of two different categories of object). This was in order to keep both the wig, and the photograph (in its representational, indexical and material form) present and vital. As in the series 'Penetralia' I cut through and layered the resulting photographs, making shallow reliefs which I re-photographed. The series of stages represent the copy, cut and paste of the title, and acknowledges that the photograph, like the wig, can be a multi-layered object.

The 'cut' stage became particularly important in this body of work because I began to introduce different kinds of space into the photograph; space within the picture, and what Lucas Blalock calls 'behind-the-picture-plane space of photography' (interviewed in Blalock and Schultz, 2018:np.). The resulting

[4] Earlier versions of the work that became Copy /Cut /Paste were exhibited at Paper Gallery, Manchester in 2016. The later, resolved work from that series have been exhibited as part of 'Jump' at The Gallery, Liverpool (2019) and at Leeds Arts University 'Curated Spaces' (2019).

[5] I am using a definition of chimera drawn from mythology rather than science. In Greek mythology a chimera is a hybrid thing composed of parts from different creatures.

photographs, rather than making the wig unfamiliar and strange as in the ‘Penetralia’ series, made the photograph itself unfamiliar and strange because of the visual confusion caused by the different types of spaces represented on its surface.

In the Conclusion I draw together the different strands of my research. I outline the transformation of the wig as it has been dematerialised, materialised, fragmented and re-shaped in my practice. It has ended up unwearable, but still visible as a wig; one that has been re-constituted through reference to its unstable, porous and fluid relations with the social. I began this thesis with reference to sad and abandoned wigs, but through the research and practice I conclude with wigs that are equally as strange, but upright and in possession of an active and dynamic presence. My photographic practice has also transformed; it has been cut and layered and has re-shaped its surfaces in order to appear and behave in a vital and material way.

Chapter One: The Anatomy of a Wig

Fig. 2 Sarah Eyre, from the series ‘Wigs’ (2012-17)

Introduction

The wig is my material *and* subject, mediated through the camera, and as such, I begin this chapter with an analysis of how an earlier photographic project 'Wigs' implanted the seeds for this research.

I continue with an analysis of the social, cultural and material histories of the wig from its first commonplace use in British society in the seventeenth century[6]. This research demonstrates how and why wigs have an aura of oddness about them, and how the history of their relationship with the body and the nature of their materials reinforces this. Even the etymology of the familiar English word "wig" points to the instability of the wig. It is derived from the word 'periwig', itself derived from the French word 'perruke', the word 'wig' emerging around 1675 (Woodforde 1971:4). An alternative word for 'perruke' in sixteenth-to-eighteenth century France was 'postiche' meaning "sham" and I discuss below how this idea of artificiality affected how the wig wearing body was perceived. In the second part of this Chapter I return to art practice by drawing together some of the themes in the first part, discussing them in the context of others' art practice and the development of my own methods.

My photographic project 'Wigs' grew out of an interest in wig wearing, although I was also making a conscious attempt to move away from the body and sensations of the wig wearer in order to experiment with ways in which the wig could make allusions to the feminine body without actually showing it. The project comprised of a series of photographs of shop-bought wigs, all seemingly free standing (there is no visual evidence of a supporting stand or head), posed with just the merest hint of gesture (looking up, down and away). These two "staging" aspects suggest that the wigs are embodied with some kind of aliveness, their gestures are human like, and they appear to be able to support

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[6] The earliest recorded use of wigs was in ancient Egypt (4th and 5th dynasties), and in ancient Assyrian, Phoenician, Chinese, Japanese cultures, and in ancient Israel. Wigs were also worn in ancient Rome and Greece. Although, for the purposes of this research, I am focusing on wig use from the sixteenth century, as this is when wig wearing become common place in Europe.

themselves without a stand, yet logically, they are just objects. The work plays on the double-take effect we can have when encountering wigs on stands in shop windows or hairdresser's salons. The act of photographing these *sculptures* was crucial in fixing and projecting this uncanny effect. I refer to this part of my image making process in sculptural terms because the objects were not made by simply putting a wig on a stand, special armatures had to be made [fig. 3] to flesh them out in order for them to look convincingly animated.

Fig. 3 Sarah Eyre, Example of wig armature, (2012)

The wigs themselves were selected for their balanced shape, which was further reinforced by the padding, teasing and styling of them so that they took on particular forms. It was the act of photographing them that transformed them from embodied wig sculptures to truly unsettling images. What I mean by this is that through the use of the camera I could select and fix the view that best communicated their in-between status, whereas when viewing the physical objects, the illusion could be smashed by viewing position or touch. The use of light and shadow to reveal and conceal parts of the object through the flattening effect of the camera became part of the photographic image, thus deepening the visual confusion. My decision to produce black and white images also suggests a particularly photographic space.

As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the ‘Wigs’ series opened up a number of lines of enquiry that this research develops. Particularly pertinent to this chapter is the development of an awareness of materials and the way they can be imbued with a degree of vitality, depending on the artistic methods used to mediate them. I am referring specifically to the wig here, but as my research developed, I also began to consider the material properties of the photograph, particularly its surface. My initial influence for this research project was not an artist who used wigs, it was Sarah Lucas and her work with tights, because of the way that the objects she uses are mediated through artistic methods in order to simultaneously maintain their familiar social and material associations, *and* become more ambiguous and unpredictable.

Sarah Lucas's ‘Octopus’ (1993) the series ‘Nuds’ (2009), and ‘Bunnies’ (1997) [figs 4 & 5] are all made from women’s tights. The works are not about tights as such, but tights are the first thing we encounter when viewing the work, and like wigs, women's tights have a 'social life' (Appadurai, 1986:3), which is always apparent in the work due to our familiarity with their use. Lucas does not shy away from this – the semiotic meanings implicit in her materials are part of the work – although, what interests me are the way that her sculptural manipulations also open up ‘expressive and associative possibilities’ (Van Adrichem, 1996:5).

Fig. 4: Sarah Lucas, ‘Pauline Bunny’, (1997) Wooden chair, vinyl seat, tights, kapok, metal wire, stockings and metal clamp, 950 x 640 x 900 mm

Fig. 5: Sarah Lucas, NUD CYCLADIC 10, (2010), Nylon tights, synthetic fibre, breeze blocks and steel wire, 1382 x 437 x 430 mm

Lucas has talked about the importance of particular materials in animating the form: ‘keep [ing] it alive - maintaining a certain energy’ (Williams, 2012:26), and certainly ‘her materials gain an agency – a life of their own’ (Williams, 2012:27). She also talks about shifting register, from the object with its literal meanings to ‘its metaphoric meaning as something beyond itself’ (Malik, 2009:16). This shift in register is apparent on many levels, the disconcerting arrangement of surfaces and meanings of the work are in constant movement, from the recognition of the everyday of beige tights, to the unsettling undertow of violence in the worn out bodies that the sculptures suggest, the uncanny doubling of the female form and to the recognition of the subversive comedy of the assembled materials. In the sections below I outline the many ways in which the wig, through its material, social and cultural history, has become such a potent object on which to situate my own artistic methods.

1.1 Defining the Modern Wig

The appearance, role, material constituents and of course cultural cargo of the wig has changed fundamentally since the emergence of the word in the late seventeenth century. For the purposes of this research I will begin by distinguishing what I mean by “wig” in a modern context, as it is modern wigs that I use in my practice, and then compare this to earlier definitions of the wig, in order to explore their differences.

So, what makes a modern wig distinct from other manifestations of “false” hair, extensions and hairpieces? It is easy to distinguish the modern wig from the first of these, the hair extension, both in terms of form and function. Formally speaking, a wig’s shape is provided by its cap. This shape is retained (to a certain extent) even when the wig is removed from the wearer’s head, thanks largely to the cap. Even off the head, a wig is still a wig. In this sense, the modern wig is something that is attached to the body, bringing with it an independently possessed shape and, as such, could be classed as a kind of prosthesis. Hair extensions, by contrast, lose any independent shape or form when detached (and lack it before being attached); they are simply material. A hair extension is like an extra panel stitched onto a dress, to change its style or size.

This points to the functional difference between wigs and extensions. Extensions are an elaboration, elongation or augmentation of what is already, largely, “naturally” there. Extensions are an example of something *false* being used to serve and bolster what is natural and original. Modern wigs, by contrast, fundamentally transform the appearance of the head; whether by introducing a totally new hairstyle (in the case of the party wig or disguise wig), or through presenting someone who is partially or completely bald as having a full head of hair.

“Hairpiece” is used as a catch-all term for female hair implements (male hairpieces are called toupees). The term hairpiece might refer to clip-on buns, chignons, ponytails, curls and fringes. Formally, they are quite different from the

modern wig: they append a new, distinct shape to the existing haircut, and although they may retain this shape when removed from the wearer's head, the overall look (of hair and hairpiece) is lost on their removal. Functionally, they also differ from the modern wig. They act as an elaboration, ornamentation or affectation of an existing, natural head of hair. In other words, they complement the overall nature of the wearer's head, rather than alter it.

Thus, functionally at least, the modern wig stands distinct from all other types of "false" hair; the toupee[7], the hair extension, and the hairpiece. All of these latter types of false hair have the role of extending, elaborating, augmenting, complementing or consolidating what is already there. The (full head) wig is the only device that fundamentally strives to transform the head of the wearer.

These definitions, in the modern context, will be useful when examining the changing social role (and definition) of the wig in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in establishing a rationale for the way I use wigs in my practice.

[7] A toupee might be regarded a type, or subset, of wig, worn by men, as a substitute or cover for partial hair loss. The toupee has many formal properties of the wig (leading to it being regarded as a subset of the wig), but as Woodforde notes, the word 'Wig' generally denotes a full head covering (see Woodforde 1971: 4). Functionally, the toupee is quite different to a wig. Like the hair extension, its aim is to bolster, consolidate and extend what is already there (if receding), namely the natural hair which still covers a sizable part of the head.

1.2 The Wig and its Problematic Materials

Wigs are made from a cap, and "hair", and it is primarily the hair, the exterior surface, that creates the wig's frisson. Kobena Mercer argues that hair is 'caught on the cusp between self and society, nature and culture' (1990:250), and I argue that the wig intensifies and problematises those boundaries, in part due to the complex nature of the hair that wigs are made from.[8]

To understand how a wig's materials can be problematic it is necessary to outline their differing functions. At the height of the wig's popularity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they were a much more complicated and expensive proposition than they are today. Wigs were highly stylized and denoted status and importance. Predominantly worn by men,[9] wigs signified different trades and professions and the individual's standing within those professions (there are still traces of this in contemporary British society in the continued use of wigs in the legal profession).

Likewise, wigs were more complicated in their construction, being made up of several constituent parts. In the most expensive cases, the "hair" was human hair, and the shape and size was provided through stuffing, ribbing and other inner structures, as well as the cap or net. These were made up of various materials including horse hair, goat hair and wool. In some cases, the "hair" part of the wig was also made from non-human materials, such as horse hair and goat hair. Lynne Festa cites *Gentleman's Magazine* 1750 where 'perukes' made from non-human hair are called 'brute-hair' (Festa, 2005:59). Other examples of organic wig materials listed by Woodforde include duck feathers (for outdoor

[8] In modern wigs, produced for sale in Western Europe or North America, the 'hair' can be either synthetic or human depending on the wig's market. Synthetic hair wigs are cheaper, ready styled and generally made for occasional use – fancy dress, cosmetic, performance etc. Whereas human hair wigs are more robust, can be purchased 'off the shelf' or styled to suit the wearer, and are generally bought for repeated or long term use. The intended uses of a human hair wig can range from cosmetic, performance to medical.

[9] Women did not wear wigs until the late eighteenth century, prior to this, they wore elaborate hairstyles enhanced by artificial hair pieces covering an armature and padding, and like the male wigs from this time they were powdered (Woodforde 1971; Pointon 1993; Sweet 2016).

wear) and wool (1971:43). There are even some examples of wigs made from inorganic materials such as iron wire (Kwass, 2006:650). John Woodforde cites a letter dated 1751, written by Horace Warpole, that discusses a friend's purchase of a wig made from iron (1971:43).

It is apparent that the materials that made up the wig's "hair" were varied and the different materials could carry diverse associations. Lynne Festa has pointed out an interesting paradox, in that the material origins of the wig 'undercut both the symbolic work performed by the wig and the stability of the very identity it is meant to proclaim' (Festa, 2005:63, see also Pointon 1993 and Kwass 2006). The human hair used for wigs is, and always has been, drawn from a variety of sources, many of which raise ethical concerns: often harvested from the poorer strata of society, be that labourers, peasants or prostitutes in the eighteenth century, or from people in developing countries today. The attitudes towards these sources of human hair used for wig-making often betray other, deeper attitudes in society with regards to race, class and sexual behaviour. In the latter part of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, human hair was imported. In the attitudes towards this imported hair, we can detect various generalisations and prejudices towards the nations who exported it (Rosenthal, 2004:5). These attitudes continue into the twentieth century. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century (what we might regard as the golden era of the wig), human hair was sourced locally, from within the same country. Research reveals (see Woodforde 1971; Festa 2005; Kwass 2006; Ofek 2009), that hair was taken from the heads of prostitutes and even the dead, and it is perhaps here that the attitudes provoked by the material human origins of wigs have contributed most clearly to the destabilization of the function of the wig.

The provenance of wig hair was clearly problematic for many writers throughout history[10]. Even at the very start of the seventeenth century, Shakespeare was writing about this trade. He refers to it several times in fact, such as in this line from *The Merchant of Venice*: 'Those crisped, snaky, golden locks…often known to be the dowry of a second head, the skull that bread them in the sepulchre' (cited in Woodforde 1971:106). Diderot, for example, in his Encyclopédie commented that 'the hair of prostitutes and of men who give way to debauchery with women dries and loses its quality' (cited in Woodforde 1971: 106).

It was not just the status and power symbolized by the wig that was undermined by the wig's materiality, its gender and sexualizing functions were also problematised. In the eighteenth century, the wig was predominantly a male affectation; women sported coiffures supplemented by "added hair", but the separate hairpiece was largely the domain of men. As such it was an affirmation of masculinity, as well as of social status, and yet the fact that the wig's hair was often sourced from women went some way towards 'undermining the masculine identity wigs ostensibly uphold' (Festa, 2005: 48). As Festa notes, for the Puritans, gender was 'god given'; a permanent, integral quality that remained in any human or organic material. The human hair in a wig would 'retain its sexed nature'; thus the wearing of it, far from upholding the wearer's masculinity, introduced an ambiguity, the threat of contamination, and potentially changed the nature of the wearer's self. An accessory like the wig 'complicates the way sex can be localized on the body', indeed, the Puritans even expressed an anxiety that the wig, by being made of female hair, could 'create a hermaphrodite of its wearer' (Festa, 2005: 62).

Marcia Pointon argues that the wig was so tied up with masculine authority that it could be seen as having a 'metonymic relationship with the male, sexed body'

[10] It is worth noting that these anxieties could be explained, in part, by the medical understanding at that time. Hair was increasingly being viewed as a carrier of disease and used as a visual representation of bodily and moral health. (Markiewiez 2014:7, Sweet 2016:86)

(1993:121), and therefore its lack, in public, was considered an eccentric or deviant act. Its removal in public to reveal a naked (shaved head), especially when women were present, was considered a shocking act as it exposed a gendered vulnerability, because the removal of the wig, like the removal of one's clothes, was considered a private act. Pointon argues that the loss, or removal of an object that had such a strong link with masculinity and power threatened the collapse of orders of class and gender. 'The wig was crucial to conformity but simultaneously capable of subverting its own orthodoxy and being presented as a site of danger both actual and symbolic' by its removal or through one's dependence on it (Pointon, 1993:121).

As well as undermining its expression of class, gender, sexuality and youthfulness, the wig also threatens the boundary between the body and that which is beyond the body (the other). In all of the above cases, the wig's function is 'undercut' (to use Festa's word) by its materiality because of a presumed or perceived contamination enabled by the material, between the head (or body) of the provider and the wearer of the wig. As Pointon argues 'The transference of human detritus from one individual to another […] lent the wig a power of association despite the fact that artistry and fashion united to disguise it' (Pointon, 1993:121). Not only does the wig's materiality problematise its function, but it also contaminates the integrity of the wearer. To quote Festa more fully: 'The wig's physical nature – the way it shuttles among different individuals, recomposing the body and its surfaces – erodes the boundaries that set the individual subject off from the world' (2005: 48). The wig introduces associations with uncleanliness and dirt, and it does so primarily at a material level: as hair.

Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva discuss systems of classification that differentiate the pure from the impure, the clean from the unclean (Douglas 1966; Kristeva 1982). Douglas defines dirt, or uncleanliness, as 'matter' that is 'out of place' (Douglas 1966: 50). In terms of the body, matter that crosses the boundaries of the body, like cut hair, or nail clippings, or that issues from the body's orifices (blood, urine, spit, etc.) has a marginal status, and becomes 'dirt' and 'out of place' immediately upon leaving the body (Douglas, 1966:150).

Kristeva draws on Douglas' ideas in her analysis of the abject (Kristeva, 1982: 69). She does not comment on hair specifically, but discusses other marginal bodily materials, such as menstrual blood and nail clippings, 'things that fall from the body' and that occupy the liminal space between the self and the other (Kristeva, 1982:71). For Kristeva, the abject is that which 'disturbs identity, system, order' and 'does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (Kristeva, 1982:4).

The aesthetic and moral values associated with the abject (i.e. moral and aesthetic "uncleanliness") are relative rather than fundamental attributes. 'Filth is not a quality in itself', Kristeva writes, 'but it applies only to what relates to a boundary and, more particularly, represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a margin' (Kristeva, 1982:4). Hair clearly aspires to this marginal status. It grows literally through the body's boundaries. Cut hair goes even further and surely attains this marginal status, having fallen from the body that previously grew it. So, at first glance then, the wig could be read as cut hair's attempt to regain cleanliness and order, an attempt to salvage cut hair from its state of abjecthood. What has fallen from the body is here being brought back 'into a proper place'. The wig appears to signify order being restored, systems being re-adopted, identity being consolidated, the undisturbing of all that had been disturbed. Wearing a wig can restore the disorder of bodily failings, by disguising baldness and ageing and projecting a coherent and conforming identity, and yet, it does not make a coherent whole, it is only a disguise.

When observed in isolation and removed from the wearer, as in my photographic practice – particularly in the series 'Furl' (figs 15 & 16) and 'Penetralia' (figs 18 & 19) – the wig's 'pretence of animation' can provoke in the viewer as strong a sense of the abject (and, for that matter, of the uncanny), as any of Kristeva's (or Freud's) examples: the corpse, the disembodied limb, the menstrual blood. When viewed – in its disembodied state at least – the wig is both abject and a contaminant. It brings "the other" into contact with the "self"; it reminds the self of the other that used to be part of it.

It could be argued that the two sets of problems posed by the materiality of the wig, the destabilising of its function, and the contamination of the self, are clear-cut, or straightforward ones. Although, according to Douglas and Kristeva, things with ‘marginal status’ can also include animals, the poor, criminals, prostitutes, the working classes (and presumably people in the developing world: providers of hair for many modern wigs). From the point of view of “proper” or “normal” society, therefore, all of these things can be considered ‘out of place’. Thus, all of the above mentioned “functional” problems of the wig could be considered consequences of the wig’s abjecthood.

Janet Miller argues that disembodied hair is ‘a troubling reminder of the absence of the body from which it originates’. It has become the ‘absent body’s symbolic presence - its ghost’ (Miller, 2008:186). Although wigs are made from ‘disembodied hair’; I would argue they are troubling for an additional reason, wigs are a reminder of how easily the body and its surfaces can be altered – disrupted even. A wig is troubling because of its porosity, its ability to merge with and transform the body by the way it can conceal the parts of our visual appearance so often linked to identity. These aspects of the wig reflect and project cultural and societal anxieties around the coherence of body and the self.

In terms of my artistic practice, the concepts of the abject and of contamination are interesting. Although, I believe that to focus too strongly on these aspects of the wig would shut down other latent associations the wig might possess. I propose that the notion of porosity is more useful. It encompasses characteristics of the abject and the uncanny, *and* positions the wig within a more malleable network of relationships with the wearer, the body, other objects and wider society.

Framing the wig in terms of porosity opens up the possibility that the body too is porous. Whist not actually using the term porous, Lynne Festa argues that for the Puritans, a covering like the wig becomes problematic when its edges are not visible, when the addition of another covering becomes a deceit, and changes the bounds of the body. Anxieties arise as invisible layers are more

easily subsumed into the body and have the potential to ‘remake’ or contaminate the ‘being within’, and are further complicated by the knowledge that the ‘layer’ is made from materials that have come from other bodies (Festa 2005: 61).

1.3 The Wig as a Cultural Object

Much has been written about the body as a site for staging the 'self' (Rosenthal, 2004:1); the argument that one's selection of clothing, cosmetics and hairstyle are to some extent performative is not new. Margaret K. Powell and Joseph Roach suggest that:

> Hair is a performance, one that happens at the boundaries of self-expression and social identity, of creativity and conformity, and of production and consumption. Hair lends itself particularly well to self-fashioning and performance because it is liminal, on the threshold, "betwixt and between" not only of nature and culture, but also of life and death (Powell and Roach, 2004:79).

Hair is particularly important because it 'emerges from the flesh' (Rosenthal, 2004:1-2), and because it is both natural and cultural; it causes one to question the boundaries that separate self from body, from interior and exterior, and from self and appearance (Mercer 1990; Rosenthal 2004:2). Wigs exaggerate and complicate these distinctions even further. Wigs enable many selves to be staged, as does clothing, but the wig's proximity to the head gives it a special, highly visible, relationship with appearance and identity. It is not always clear when someone is wearing a wig; it can blend in with the body in a way that clothes cannot. It is the fact that the wig is detachable, and so easily absorbed onto the surface of the body that makes it more complex than a garment. An object that allows for the staging of multiple selves becomes distrustful, furthermore, it undoes any notion of continuity between the body's outward appearance and internal character.

As the wig became more affordable in the eighteenth century, and its wearing was diffused across a wider sector of society, the wig's role as signifier of status and rank was undermined. Men began to own a number of different wigs, each with their own "character", and the purchase of a wig allowed men to take on the outward appearance of rank and status, and become socially mobile. Thus, the wig became a way of masking the wearer's actual social status and projecting another. Both Festa (2005) and Pointon (1993) discuss the wig's role in the gradual shift in approach to thinking about the self and the body. They also examine the ways in which the wig (as a purchasable accessory) became

an agent of change, in terms of the relationship between the objects one might possess and the characteristics one might be deemed to have.

Within a century, the wig had transformed from being an exclusive uniform that conveyed one (and only one) social "position" or rank on the wearer, to becoming a mechanism for projecting one's inner character. And yet if these expressions of the self are so dependent on surface representation, how deep can we really say that "self" is? The fact that the wig (and what it stands for) can be 'assumed and shucked off at will implies the existence of an intentional "deep" subject residing behind these shifting layers and surfaces' (Festa, 2005:71). Although the writers of the wig tracts discuss the notion of a "self", they, according to Festa also 'contemplate the possibility that there is nothing beneath the inflated sartorial expressions of the wig' (Festa, 2005:71). This is an interesting point because it raises questions about shifting surfaces and depths which could still apply to the wig in its contemporary usage, particularly in terms of representation, and in revealing the slippage between appearance and identity. I take up this theme in more detail in Section 1.5: Transformative Materials, in my discussion of Lorna Simpson's work.

Ostensibly a wig could be considered a surface; an exaggeration of a surface, and a surface affectation. To consider a wig as without depth is to overlook the many connotations, associations and identities that it brings with it: the wig's cultural cargo. This set of associations, which we might superficially call its "depth", has less to do with the wig's material origins. Instead the wig's depth is drawn from the set of identities or personalities associated with its particular hair colour, length, style, texture and so on, in the wider visual culture. For instance, a long, thick, shiny, blonde wig might bestow an acceptable type of healthy, adult femininity. A ginger bob might denote a more innocent but fun "girl-next-door-ness". And so on. These associations, though open to various readings and ambiguities, are all drawn from the wider set of cultural typologies of perceived femininities.

With wigs, it is not the *hair* as such but the hairstyle that communicates the strongest indexical relationship with the body, but paradoxically there is often no

specific body, just a visual representation of a *type* of body. Galia Ofek argues that the style and colour of women's hair (naturally grown and artificially enhanced) as represented in literature, painting and advertising in Victorian Britain, contributed to the formation of key feminine typologies. She argues that a woman's hairstyle became a key visual representation of her character or a 'synecdoche' for a 'whole social body', especially in terms of sexuality (Ofek, 2009:7), the perception of which followed certain 'hair rules' understood by Victorian society, reinforced through literature, commentary, and advertising, (Ofek, 2009:148). The tropes she identifies became key cultural stereotypes that still influence both hairstyles and wig styles in Britain today. Neat, fair and controlled hair, for example, signified purity, wholesomeness and virtue. The reverse, those women with untidy, disordered, brunette, uncontrolled and/or curly hair were often pathologised as out-of-control, sexual, abject. Many writers on the culture of hair have argued that a woman's hairstyle still acts as a metonym for her body and her sexuality (Cooper 1971; Steele 1985; Warner 1994; McCracken 1997; Biddle-Perry 2008; McKellar 2008). One could argue that the semiotics of modern hairstyles (and off-the-shelf wig styles) in the UK today, although not subject to such strict rules as they were for the Victorians, have changed little[11].

For all my photographs, I have chosen wigs that have what I would call a "generic" Western or Northern European[12] quality, for example, shoulder length, straight or wavy, and light to mid-brown. The reason for this is that these

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[11] Contemporary wig shops stock only a narrow range of easily identifiable styles and 'personalities', often their names further reinforce associations. For example, a thick, long layered, 'natural' blonde or light-brown haired wig might be called 'Rachel' making reference to the wholesome, all-American room-mate 'Rachel' in TV sitcom 'Friends'. Long, full blonde and long full dark brunette (with or without streaks, and both wavy and straight) with the occasional redhead, also proliferate. And, one might associate these wigs with the hairstyles of youthful, desirable, female celebrities, whose hairstyles (often artificially enhanced) and reflect 'the influence of the sex industry on our ideas of what a woman should look like' (Caroline Cox cited in Khaleeli 2012). Such associations, though open to various readings and ambiguities, are all drawn from the wider set of cultural typologies for perceived femininity.

[12] They are also wigs that connote whiteness, despite wig shop customers being ethnically diverse, wig styles (at the time of writing) are not. The underlying societal message is that caucasian hair texture and style still represents aspirational standards of beauty.

hairstyles connote an ordinary “nice girl” femininity, rather than a highly sexualised or fashionable look, and their bland familiarity makes it harder for a viewer to embody them with particular personality, lifestyle or even age. All the wigs that I have used conform to this unremarkable trope.

There is one function of the wig not considered so far, and that is the power of the wig to affirm the wearer’s membership of a wider group, or to allow the wearer to conform to an acknowledged type. Seventeenth and eighteenth century wigs enabled their wearers to conform to a common identity (Pointon, 1993:116); just as modern women’s wigs often allow their wearers to subscribe to a common and societally acceptable feminine trope.

Despite wigs having been around for thousands of years, our understanding of them is still rooted in sixteenth century notions of falsity and distrust. It is this that gives them a powerful charge or vitality (to use Jane Bennett’s term), because, I believe they still provoke a deep-seated anxiety about what they (the wig) might do to the sense of wholeness we have about our bodies. Their transformative qualities can make us question our subjectivity, opening up the possibility that the construction of our selves is perhaps more fragile than we might assume.

1.4 The Wig and The Uncanny

A wig in its disembodied state can provoke a seemingly irrational response in the viewer. This is something I played on in the series 'Wigs'; positioning them as if captured hovering between aliveness and an inanimate state in order to maximise their uncanny qualities [fig. 2]. The uncanny is part of a wider set of concepts that sit within psychoanalytic theory, and a brief investigation of some of these concepts has been useful in exploring other kinds of relationship we might have with the wig beyond wearing it.

Psychoanalytic theory, put simply, is the term used to describe a number of concepts based on the writings of Sigmund Freud, which focus on the unconscious, sexuality and subjectivity (Rose 2016, Van Gelder and Westgeest 2011:214). Alexandra M. Kokoli (2016:11) argues that the tropes of psychoanalytic theory have become embedded within western popular culture[13] and I believe this is demonstrated in the way that many psychoanalytic motifs (particularly the unconscious, fetishism, the uncanny) are continually deployed in popular cinema, fiction, art and fashion[14]. Therefore, a psychoanalytic reading is useful in terms of how certain objects are positioned in our society, and in turn, how we perceive and respond to those objects. A wig is the kind of object that could be singled out using a psychoanalytic framework because it has particular visual qualities that make it especially relevant to the concepts of the unconscious, subjectivity and sexuality, which might, to some degree, account for its affective charge.

Psychoanalytic theory is based on the idea that the mind is split between the conscious and the unconscious. The unconscious, which could be likened to a

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[13] Kokoli argues that Freud's work was a key part of popular culture in the 1970s due to the publication of some of his key works by the Pelican library - these editions were edited by James Strachey, and could be bought at newsagents and stations, she argues, in the context of the second wave of feminist writing from that era, that Freud wasn't just for the 'academically minded' (2016:11).

[14] For example, the fashion designer Alexander McQueen frequently deployed tropes of fetishism and the uncanny in his catwalk shows. Other prominent examples include the work of fashion photographer Tim Walker, filmmaker David Lynch and artist Cindy Sherman.

layer deep within the mind, is hidden and inaccessible. Our unconscious can leak through into our conscious mind in various ways, most notably in dreams, and also in the form of blind spots, slips of the tongue, and visual uncertainty, threatening our subjectivity (Rose, 2016:152). In regard to wigs, a wig could project a significant amount of visual uncertainty, especially when encountered apart from the body, because it could be seen as abject. A wig could slip unnoticed from its position on the head, revealing the wearer to be incomplete in some way, making us question what we thought to be whole beforehand (I discuss my use of the wig slip as a metaphor in the final paragraph of this section). The wig can also be likened to a scalp trophy, a decapitated head or the image of Medusa (a familiar motif in art and cinema), whose 'hair' provokes fear of emasculation, 'since it resembles detached male organs which have been assimilated to a female body, conferring on it powers and privileges which were once the male's' (Ofek, 2009:15). These are some examples of how the wig's associations can provoke deep-seated anxieties about the boundaries of the body and the self, fear of castration (symbolic), hauntedness and death.

The psychological concept of the 'Uncanny' (or *unheimlich* in German) was first outlined by Ernst Jentsch in 1908 however it is Freud's (1919) essay that firmly positioned uncanny phenomena as 'nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed' (Freud, 1919:148). Freud connects the uncanny to the fear of something that has been long been hidden which has now returned to the open (Freud 1919:132). The repressed memory or experience 'now defined as fearful, re-emerges as something unfamiliar and thereby unsettling' (Freud, 1919:149).

Hair itself can have an uncanny (and abject, as already discussed) quality. Janet Miller comments that:

> On the body, hair is controlled, familiar and homely: it is part of us. Off the body, it transforms itself into something at the same time alien, unfamiliar and unhomely (Miller 2008:185).

She goes on to say that it could be perceived as the ghostly reminder of the absent body from which it originates: ‘thus disembodied hair becomes an uncanny and enduring motif in a variety of representations of the spectral’ (Miller, 2008:184). Wigs and hairpieces can operate in a similar way, they do not need to be made from human hair to be uncanny, the fact that they look like hair is enough.

A disembodied wig can also represent the spectral. The wig is shaped like a head (a wig folded or formless in other ways is also uncanny, but in a different way), and so can represent a kind of ghostly body. It is therefore uncanny in the sense that its form suggests an inanimate object that is capable of independent activity. Freud talks about dolls, wax figures and mannequins as being uncanny in their ability to hover between inanimate and animate and evoke childhood or repressed fears of ghosts - the dead returning (Freud, 1919:141). Death itself (and reminders of death) is uncanny. Freud’s uncanny relates to dismemberment: severed heads and limbs, and to the fear of castration. In a psychoanalytical framework this generates anxiety because it suggests that the body or self could become a non-body or non-self: an object, as the boundary between body and object is not clear cut (Freud, 1919: 150). The confusion arises when the cut-off part – in the sense that it is detachable – is seemingly capable of independent activity (like a wig that can be slipped on and off). This further muddies our perceptions of what is living (and part of the self), and what is not living (and is other to the self). And, of course it is worth noting that hair has the ability to survive, grow even, long after the body has decomposed (Miller, 2008:184).

Doubling is also a trope of the uncanny, and the wig is an uncanny double of the head, doubly uncanny because it is a double of a disembodied head without a face. These doubling and disembodied motifs can be seen in the work of Sarah Lucas, particularly in her series of ‘Bunny’ sculptures that trigger a double-take because of their almost life-like qualities [fig.2]. They are made from stuffed tights and old office chairs but the way that they conjure up the female form through the fleshy qualities of the tights and the post-coital flop of splayed legs is uncanny. The banality or homeliness of the materials makes

them more so; a case of the familiar being rendered alien by the artist, and by the anxiety provoked by an awkward clash of associations that mix mundanity with the perverse, perhaps the repressed unconscious leaking through to our conscious minds.

My own practice evokes uncanny effects in a different way. I frame the wig as a layer and surface or, perhaps more accurately, as an object that functions *through* its surface. What interests me is the ability of this *familiar* surface to slip, and become *unfamiliar*. The idea that a surface – a wig – might slip, and reveal complex layers and depths where logically they are not meant to be, is even more uncanny. What's more, a wig slip can be considered rather like a Freudian parapraxis (Freud, 1901:26) in the revelation that a stable, inanimate object such as a wig is suddenly mystifying, has indefinable and porous edges and can reveal itself to be ambiguous and unstable. It is this notion of wig slips that has driven the development of my cutting and layering methods in the projects 'Furl', 'Penetralia' and 'Copy / Cut / Paste'.

1.5 Transformative Materials

The wig's relationship to the social body has been important in grounding my research, and in the sections above I have outlined some of the ways that the wig and body have a complex relationship. However, in my own practice, I have made the decision to focus on the wig as an object in its own right, off the body as a way of exploring what it can reveal about itself when not being used being used as a performative "prop". I refer to the wig in this context as *disembodied*, which might imply that there is no bodily connection at all. This would be wrong, as although I detach the wig from the wearer, the suggestion of either the social or/and physical body is still present in the wig in some form or other throughout these bodies of work.

The artists I discuss below all make work that alludes to disembodiment; the appearance and disappearance of the body without actually directly representing the body. An exploration of their use of materials is a useful way of drawing together some of the themes I have identified through my historical research into the use of the wig. Alongside this I have briefly analysed how their methods have informed decisions that I have made in my own practice, and in the final section of this chapter I shift my discussion of materials into a photographic context.

Emma Hart

'Dirty Looks' (2013) and 'Spread' (2015) by Emma Hart are works that I have found useful to study because of the way that the bodily objects she makes out of clay become *more than* what they depict due to her choice of materials. The materiality of Hart's sculptures operates in a different way to Sarah Lucas's, because the associative power of women's tights is clearly evident in Lucas's work, despite the sculptural mediation. However, the *actual* objects in Hart's work, like my photographs of wigs, are once-removed: the tongues and hair are made from clay, arguably making them representations. In my own work, there is an indexical connection to the physical wig, something I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three, and I argue that the associative power of the represented object is still as vibrant, possibly even more so, by the translation

into a different material which can equally *animate* the form, making them more than representations.

Fig. 6: Emma Hart, ‘Dirty Looks’, 2013, Ceramic, wood, video and decal transfer images

‘Dirty Looks’ (2013) [fig.6] comprises of an assortment of ad-hoc assemblages of readymade objects combined with hand-made ceramic tongues. The tongues are ‘comical: shiny, mottled pink and lumpy’ (Morgan, 2015: np.). Tongues are an interesting part of the body as they sit between inside and outside, intimate and public, but they have the fleshy colour and shiny texture of something that belongs deep inside the body. Hart’s disembodiment of the tongues imbues them with a life of their own, Ellie Morgan comments that they are ‘purposefully inserting themselves into, and asserting their-selves out of, the objects in the

room— as if screaming “Lick me!”, “Talk to me!”, “Eat me!”’ (Morgan, 2015: np.). The sculptures are rough and comical yet still evoke powerful impressions of the corporeal, the erotic and the uncanny through their associations with the body’s interior; the part of us that should remain hidden.

Fig. 7: Emma Hart, ‘Spread’ (2015), ceramic and fabric

‘Spread’ (2015) [fig. 7] is a multi-part installation comprising of sound, ready-made objects and ceramic “hair” that looks like it has been squeezed from wall mounted ceramic anal “scrunchies”. The ceramic ponytails (detached from the body like fake ponytails, one could argue that they are almost-wigs) are thickly glazed, this makes them hover between alluring and tactile, repulsive and slimy. When viewing the work, it is hard to tell if the ceramic strands are meant to be hair or faeces; both are examples of bodily waste and would be defined by Kristeva as abject (1982:71). Hart’s glossy ceramic ponytails seduce and repel. Her choice of materials exaggerates a quality that is present in hair (and by extension, wigs). This suggests that a *translation*, representing one material quality through another (similar to the way I translate wigs into photographs of wigs), can draw out associations hidden in the original. An example of this in my practice is the way that I fold and photograph wigs in my experimental series ‘Furl’ to allude to entrails and meat (I discuss ‘Furl’ in more detail in Chapter

Two), or cut through and layer photographs of wigs to suggest that the wig (and the photograph) is a surface that conceals an almost corporeal interiority.

Alice Maher

Whilst not referencing wigs specifically, Alice Maher's 'Folt' (1993) [fig. 8] makes reference to the "detachability" of hairstyles and the classification of appearance. These images seem to form a typology of identities: Fionna Barber (1993:np) has argued that the identities depicted in Maher's drawings represent the different 'values, personae, imaginings and choices that girls and women adopt in order to operate within a world that continually sites them outside of understanding'.

Fig. 8: Alice Maher, 'Folt', (1993), Oil on paper, pins, hair braids, 103cm × 124.5cm

The drawings appear pinned, as if in a specimen case, or like a pinboard in a teenager's bedroom. The informality of the presentation reinforces the detachable nature of female 'personae' that the hairstyles suggest. The work implies that despite shifts in our appearance, it is what our identity represents that determines how we are perceived, classified and controlled within our wider society. Wigs of course operate in the same way; connections can be drawn

between Maher's work and wig displays you can see in British shop windows. What appeals to me in this work is the economy of Maher's drawing; despite the simple outlines the hairstyles (and other objects) are immediately recognisable, embodied even. It is this visual immediacy that I attempted to achieve with 'Wigs'.

Placed alongside Maher's drawings is a transparent box containing a long braid of human hair, made from the discarded hair of hundreds of people (the same hair she used for the piece 'Keep' [1992]). This mingling of the detritus from multiple bodies brings me back to the wig's troublesome materiality. As I have discussed above, the materials that wigs are from have often problematised their intended functions. The use of other people's hair in Maher's braid, used in both 'Keep' and 'Folt' can provoke an anxiety in the viewer. Close proximity to a loved one's long hair is fine, but close proximity to a stranger's hair, removed from the context of the body is something else entirely, as it threatens the body's borders.

Maher continually makes reference to abundant hair, and abundant hair out of context could be considered grotesque, uncanny and possibly abject. 'Coma Berenices I and II' (1999) [fig 9] and 'Andromeda', (1999) have this unsettling quality, and due to the large scale of the work the viewer could feel engulfed by the hair. The twisted coils in 'Coma Berenices I and II' have a visceral quality, and although it is hard not to feel repulsed at the clear link between hair and guts, the work also hints at the seductiveness of soft and shiny coils of hair. Like Emma Hart's pieces discussed previously (and in my own work), these images that represent a surface also allude to the private, hidden interior of the body.

Fig. 9: Alice Maher, ‘Coma Berenices I & II’, (1999), charcoal on paper, 152cm × 183cm

We might also argue that Maher and Hart’s work has an abject quality because of the excess of female corporeality in their motifs: the body has well and truly escaped its boundaries. Hart’s tongues are super-sized, and her ponytails, and Maher’s tresses, are larger than life. Whilst the waggling tongues are not

specifically gendered (although play on associations and clichés of the feminine), the voice (quite literally as sound is used in Hart's pieces) is distinctly female. Susan Stewart writes that 'The giant is […] a mixed category; a violator of boundary […] an overabundance of the natural and hence an affront to cultural systems' (1992:73), and Maher and Hart's larger than life bodily objects fit this analysis.

Margarita Gluzberg

Margarita Gluzberg's large scale drawings of wigs [fig. 10], have a similar monstrous quality to Maher's. Gluzberg has removed any indication of a wearing body so we are forced to confront the strangeness of the wig as an object in its own right, much the same as I do in my practice.

Fig. 10: Margarita Gluzberg, 'Heartshaped Beard', (1999), pencil on paper, 150 x 200 cm

Her work brings out the uncanny qualities of the wig. In Gluzberg's early drawings we recognize the link to women's hairstyles, but unlike Maher's corporeal coils, these are more reminiscent of old wigs found in dressing up boxes or charity shops: they have an almost animal quality, like shed skin or fur. This slightly horrific association is extended further in her wig spider drawings [fig. 11]. These drawings don't just demonstrate the capability of a wig to be both seductive and horrific, they also, albeit in a more abstract way, reference the wig's ability to transform; to shift from one being to another.

Fig. 11: Margarita Gluzberg, 'Spiderwig', (2000), pencil on paper, 150 x 200 cm

Lorna Simpson

Lorna Simpson's work encompasses photography, video, painting, installation and use of found material, her work explores themes of gender, identity, race and culture, and the body. Hair has featured in many of her works for example ‘Memory Knots’ (1989), ‘Square Deal’ (1990) and ‘Same’ (1991), all of which focus on the “sociopolitics” of hair and the slippage between photography, representation and appearance; both in terms of the body and the photographic surface itself.

Hair can function rather like a photograph in the sense that they both have an indexical link to the subject. Angela Rosenthal has commented that ‘hair has so often been thought of as containing the essence of individuality and personhood; a lock of hair can serve as a synecdoche for the body from whence it came’ (Rosenthal, 2004:2). She is talking about an individual’s hair used in Victorian memorial jewellery, but her point raises an interesting contradiction. Hair in a wig, or a lock of hair in the form of a hairpiece despite being worn to express someone’s individuality, actually serves as an indexical connection to something more generic: a surface or layer, rather than a specific body. A wig draws attention to the slippage between hair, one’s appearance and the body. A photograph (particularly an analogue photograph) has a strong indexical connection to the subject of the photograph, and as Brooke Belisle observes in relation to Lorna Simpson’s use of hair,

> As a representation at once continuous and discontinuous with the body, a field of relations in which identity is constructed and contested, expressed and preserved, hair bears a special relationship to photography. It raises questions about appearance and representation that a photograph reiterates (Belisle, 2011:170).

As Belisle hints here, and I as discuss below, a photograph also conceals a more troublesome relationship with its subject.

Fig. 12: Lorna Simpson, ‘Wigs Portfolio’ (1994), Twenty-one lithographs on felt, with seventeen lithographed felt text panels, 182.9 x 411.5 cm

‘Wigs’ (and ‘Wigs II’ [1994-96]) [fig. 12] is a multi-part installation comprising of photo-lithographs of different wigs printed onto felt panels. The images of wigs represent a range of hairstyles, most of which are commonly associated with women and in some cases culturally associated with African American women. Accompanying text uses quotes from passages and conversations that reinforce the notion that our hair, dress, and skin colour are cultural sites where our appearance, and therefore our identity – as the two are closely intertwined – are constructed and classified.

‘Wigs’ and ‘Wigs II’ do more than just draw attention to stereotypes, Simpson is using hair and wigs to show how identity – specifically identities around femininity and blackness – are perceived at the level of appearance. Wigs, because of their detachable nature (this detachability is reinforced through the different arrangements of the wigs in the photographs, and through the inclusion of the blonde wig) show how easily these identities – or stereotypes – can be “worn”, and altered. Simpson’s work reinforces a similar point to Alice Maher’s, which is that our appearance shifts, yet our appearance is still the site where our identity is perceived, classified and controlled.

Brooke Belisle has written about the 'embodiment of appearance' in Simpson's work, and argues that Simpson's use of wigs (rather than hair, which she has used in all her previous work) in ‘Wigs’ and ‘Wigs II’ reveals a ‘potential slippage, at the level of appearance, between a representation and what it would represent’. She continues to argue that this 'slippage' not only exposes the *wig* as “an unreliable double” it can also be applied to the photograph because:

> their mode of doubling relies on the perceived continuity of identity and appearance that it disproves. A photograph can communicate identity to the degree that identity is deemed continuous with appearance; but, as a representation distinct from what it represents, a photograph challenges such continuity (Belisle, 2011:168).

Belisle comments that a wig operates in a similar way, as a wig is also taken to be a direct representation of identity (through its hairstyle, as I have pointed out previously). Although, due to the wig’s detachable nature, it reveals how the body’s surface functions as a representation, and therefore challenges the continuity between appearance and identity. It is this aspect of the wig, its ability to disrupt the connection between body and self, that has contributed to the social anxiety that has followed its history. This can be framed as yet another example of what I call (in Section 1.4) a wig slip: the first example of this is through the uncanny, and the second emerges through the porosity of the wig.

Brooke Belisle has identified in Lorna Simpson’s work the notion that the photograph also can slip, as it too can be revealed as an unreliable representation or ‘double’. Belisle comments on the use of felt in many of Simpson’s works (including ‘Wigs’ and ‘Wigs II’), and how this material interferes with the photographic surface and ‘challenges the idea that the photographic image and the surface of the photograph exactly coincide (2011:165). This surface disruption can also be seen in very glossy prints that always reflect some other kind of image on top of the image depicted. Belisle comments, in relation to Simpson’s felt work (not ‘Wigs’, but a larger multi panelled piece ‘The Park’ [1995]), that:

> Different viewing positions alter how the image appears to the extent that it seems less stable than an ordinary photograph. It appears to possess various aspects, and with them, a potential for withholding, for depth and invisibilities (Belisle, 2011:165).

Lorna Simpson's photographs of wigs have very different associations from the previous art works I have examined. The wig's associations with the abject or uncanny are not evident in her photographs, if anything her photographs of wigs are banal. What Simpson's work suggests is that wigs can also have other kinds of agency as an object. That, when photographed, they can remind us (because of their own slippery nature), that representation, identity, appearance – whether within the surface of the photograph or the surface of the body – is complex. The wig's detachability, its falseness, reminds us of how easy it is to disguise, conceal, trick us into believing what we see: that the surface is the depth, or that the surface is all there is. Lorna Simpson's photographs, particularly 'Wigs' and 'Wigs II', reveal how photographic representation is also unreliable, like the wig, it 'does not simply double what it pictures, but weaves together the image and what it would represent in multiple internal and external relationships of potential reference, association, and meaning' (Belisle, 2011:171).

Conclusion

Drawing this chapter to a close I want to summarise some of the key themes that have emerged as I have begun to open out the wig, by identifying its cultural, societal and semiotic baggage, and in drawing attention to the myriad ways it affects the body.

The discussion of social, cultural and material histories of the wig at the start of this chapter shows that, within a Western cultural context, we have always had a complicated relationship with the wig. From the early seventeenth century up to the present day, wigs have had a well-understood performative role; to affirm status, whether relating to wealth or profession), or to project the concept of physical coherence or wholeness. As my research in Sections 2 and 3 indicates, this role was continually undermined by the wig's materials, and by the impression of falseness and artificiality implicit in the wig's function.

Because wigs are so closely entwined with appearance and identity they exaggerate and complicate the boundaries between interior and exterior, and self and appearance. Due to their prosthetic nature they are easily absorbed onto the permeable surface of the body which makes them slippery and porous and ultimately unstable as objects.

In Section 4 I explored the wig through the framework of the uncanny, and from there I began to think about the notion of the wig slip. A slip of the tongue, or parapraxis in psychoanalytic terms might suggest a gap in the conscious mind, opening up to reveal an unexpected layer of our unconscious drives buried deep inside. The development of the wig slip as a conceptual thread and visual metaphor has been useful in drawing together the different ways in which the wig disrupts or challenges notions of wholeness. A wig that has slipped reveals what is concealed underneath, and it also reveals itself to be a surface and a layer. It can reveal something that is meant to be kept hidden, but it can also expose just another layer. A wig slip can reveal a paradox, a wig folded back on itself, an exterior surface with its own interior, and it can reveal itself to be a more alien, unhomely and disturbing object. In Chapter Two I expand on this metaphor and consider the notion that the wig itself might have a depth, that

there is a slippage between what we understand of its function and meaning within human networks, and what the wig itself might mean when it is framed in a less human-centred way.

Lorna Simpson's work with hair and wigs, and the essay by Brooke Belisle helped the formation of connections between wigs and photographs, which has become one of the main threads that runs through the rest of this thesis. I identified that the wig has an indexical relationship with the body in two ways, through its materials (if it is made from human hair), and through its hairstyle, although there is often no specific body, just a visual representation of a *type* of body. There is a similarity here to the way that the photograph too can have an actual (and perceived) indexical relationship with the subject of the photograph, and, as with wigs, this relationship is complicated. As Brooke Belisle has argued in relation to the work of Lorna Simpson, the photograph is also an 'unreliable double' (Belisle, 2011:168). This suggests that the photograph too can slip and this is something that I expand on in Chapters Two and Three in relation to my own practice.

Materiality has been an important thread running through this chapter. I have discussed pieces of artwork where the actual or suggestive properties of the material give them a form of vitality. We recognise the objects through understanding the history of their use; they have energy because they are familiar to us, and because of that familiarity we also recognise the tension that occurs when they are placed in an artistic context. This can be seen in Sarah Lucas's use of tights, and in the way that Emma Hart and Alice Maher make representations of hair (their use of charcoal or clay does not diminish the associative effect of copious hair). I argue that my use of photography does not diminish the disembodied wig's ability to provoke an uncanny or abject response in the viewer. This associative vitality in materials is very different from the kind of vibrancy or vitality that Jane Bennett and other New Materialist thinkers identify as agency in all human and non-human objects and materials. In Chapter Two I will apply a New Materialist framework in order to explore how the wig and the photograph might demonstrate a kind of independent agency that exist beyond our relations with them.

Chapter Two: Relational Surfaces

Introduction

In the chapter that follows I explore the wig, the photograph and my practice using a methodological framework based on New Materialism. I am aware of other possible approaches that I have chosen not to focus on, namely, the Post-Structuralist theory of Deconstruction; the analytic unpicking of texts devised by Jacques Derrida. Also, approaches loosely termed as Post-Human, particularly feminist thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Katherine N. Hayles and Helen Hester.

Returning to the story at the beginning of the thesis, it was looking twice at the wig – discovering what Julia Breitbach (2011:35) refers to as 'latent thingness' of objects – that started this research. In the sections below I explore the notion that wigs demonstrate what Jane Bennett calls 'thing-power' (Bennett, 2010:4), in the way that 'they make their presence known to us or, one could say, make "calls" to which we are continually responding' (Bennett interviewed in Bennett and Loenhart, 2011:np). This implies that things, or the stuff around us has an independence, an agency even, *outside* of their human-centred networks.

Agency is a problematic word as it could imply that objects such as wigs have a human-like quality, however I am not trying to suggest this is the case. Instead I have developed a methodological framework based on New Materialist ideas as a way of theoretically positioning the notion of non-human agency in relation to wigs and photographs. In terms of my practice, this methodological framework is a way of conceptually disembodying the wig by shifting beyond anthropocentric ideas, such as the uncanny, to open up the possibilities and interactions that might unfold when the wig is seen as having a vitality and independence of its own.

In New Materialist theories[15], in simple terms, "agency" implies that every object (human and non-human) is an agent within a larger network of forces. Jane Bennett, whose 'Vital Materialism' could be defined as a New Materialist philosophy, defines agency in this context as:

> The capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans, but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own (Bennett, 2010: viii).

New Materialist theoretical approaches (and the associated philosophies of Speculative Realism and Object Orientated Philosophy), in broad terms, challenge dualist philosophical traditions that separate mind and matter, and nature and culture, they 'explore a monist perspective, devoid of the dualisms that have dominated the humanities (and sciences) until today, by giving special attention to matter, which has been so neglected by dualist thought' (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012:85) New Materialism is about thinking beyond human-centred epistemology and 'speculating instead about the nature of the non-human: cotton, stones, mosquitoes, the world around us' (Braidotti interviewed in Braidotti and Vermeulen, 2014:np). These theorists flatten out the hierarchies between the human subject and non-

[15] I am using New Materialism as an umbrella term for a number of contemporary philosophical approaches, such as Speculative Realism, Object Orientated Ontology and Actor Network Theory, that have in common an interest in matter from the position of challenging the dualist philosophical traditions that hierarchies and separates human mind, body then stuff. There are also overlaps between New Materialism and Post-Human approaches in the way that both reconceptualise the relationships between the human body, nature and technology. New Materialism is multi-disciplinary in the sense that ideas and positions have evolved through the disciplines of anthropology, the sciences, philosophy, feminist studies, sociology and the arts and humanities. Key thinkers associated with New Materialism and its associated theories are Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, Manuel DeLanda, Jane Bennett and many of these are influenced by the writings of Donna Haraway, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as earlier philosophical ideas from Heidegger, Spinoza and Marx. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to compile a genealogy of New Materialism especially as there are so many nuances in terms of the evolution of these theories. There are three texts that function as genealogies that I found particularly useful. Iris van der Tuin and Rick Dolphijn's 2012 'New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies', particularly the interview with Rosi Braidotti pp. 20-37, and their introduction to Part II of the book, pp. 85-92. Jane Bennett's preface to 'Vibrant Matter' 2010 pp. vii-xiv and Harman's 2018 'Object Orientated Ontology'.

human “stuff” to argue that all non-human objects are *more than* their effect on humans, that non-humans and humans have an interconnected agency, and are hierarchically equal (Holbraad, 2011:7).

The notion of porosity is also common to many of these theoretical approaches. To summarise, rather than seeing objects and bodies as separate entities with clearly defined boundaries (as in the Cartesian view of subject/object relations), these theories propose that the boundaries between all matter are permeable and porous. For Bennett this means that:

> When humans act, they do not exercise exclusively human powers, but express and engage the agency of a variety of other actants – including food, micro-organisms, minerals, artefacts, sounds, bio- and other technologies and so on. There is a difference between a human individual and a stone, but neither considered alone has real agency: the locus of agency is always a human-non-human collective (Bennett, interviewed in Bennett and Loenhart, 2011:np).

Porous boundaries imply that all matter is in a constant state of entanglement, and could be considered as ‘multiple and becoming, constantly in flux’ (Braidotti interviewed in Braidotti and Vermuelen, 2014:np). “Becoming” is a complex term, Lisa Blackman (2008:40) defines it in simple terms, as refusing the ‘idea of separation, between the self and other: human and non-human.’ The concept of becoming is in opposition to the idea that we have an “authentic self” somehow hidden under various social masks. Blackman, like Bennett (2010:viii) draws on Bruno Latour’s (2007) concept of the body (this does not just mean a human body) as an assemblage, in the way that the body can be constituted ‘from artefacts, techniques and technologies’ (Blackman, 2008:97). The implications for my research is that this provides a theoretical framework for arguing that the wig is an unstable and in-between object, or a “body” that is always in a *state of becoming*.

Alongside Jane Bennett’s New Materialism-influenced ‘thing-power’, I also draw upon the earlier writings of Bill Brown’s *Thing Theory* (2001). As previously stated, Julia Breitbach (2011:35), talks about the ‘*latent* thingness’ [my italics] of objects, and this implies that all objects have ‘thingness’ lurking

inside them. Both Bennett (2010: xvi) and Brown (2001:4) claim (albeit in slightly different ways) that it is when an object's edges have become more conceptually porous and its 'thingness' is revealed, that we catch a glimpse of its potential independence. These texts have enabled me to devise the term "thingyfy" as a way of demonstrating how my methodological framework relates to my practice through making photographs of wigs more materially porous (I develop this idea further in Section 2.2 of this chapter and more fully in Chapter Three).

All these theories position the objects (human and non-human) in relational groups or networks: the difference between them relates to the degree to which humans are at the centre (or not) of those networks. Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox comment that the agency of things is not 'human-like' but refers to 'the ways in which specific material configurations are actively engaged in shaping relations' (Harvey and Knox, 2014:6). Latour refers to these relationships as networks, Bennett (2010: xviii) uses the term 'assemblages' (borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari), and Harvey and Knox (2014:7) use the more general term 'relational conditions', which is the term I use in this thesis for the culturally, environmentally and socially constituted web or framework in which we understand wigs and photographs[16]. The term 'relational conditions' reminds us that agency is a multiple-way process. It is the particular relational conditions that the wig has with the body, with the camera and the photograph, with the viewer and with myself that has informed this research project. This is why 'relational conditions' seems like the most appropriate term for my methodological approach.

Harvey and Knox comment that 'things are relational' and 'that any specific material form or entity with edges, surfaces, or bounded integrity is not only

[16] Relational conditions or relational configurations are commonly used terms within a broad range of New Materialist, Affect and Non-Representational theories and relate more broadly to the different contexts, domains and 'backgrounds' 'against which particular things show up and take on significance', (Anderson, 2010:8).

provisional but also potentially transformative of other entities' (2014:1). The first part of this chapter draws on relevant literature *and* my arts practice to map the different ways a seemingly stable object like a wig can demonstrate agency or transformative qualities, depending upon its participation within a range of relational conditions.

The second part of the chapter explores the relational conditions that bring photographs into being, and then moves on to outline how differentiating between "things" and "objects" has informed a body of photography and photo-collage work: 'Penetralia', which "thingyfies" wigs in order to shift the usual relational conditions we use to understand wigs.

Another aspect of objects that all three theories (to differing degrees) have in common is the proposition that all objects have unknown qualities that cannot be defined through the object's relational conditions. To some extent this means that objects can exist (and demonstrate agency) outside of relational conditions. This quality of objects has been referred to as 'surplus' and 'excess' by Harman (2018:49) and Harvey and Knox (2014:6). The third part of the chapter outlines the limitations of human-centred relational conditions and how the idea of excess can be explored in wigs *and* in photographs. This leads into developing the proposition that wigs can have less visible (or knowable) sides to them that are outside of human-centred perception.

2.1 Mapping the Wig's Relational Conditions

The most straightforward way to explore the notion that objects[17] like wigs can demonstrate a degree of agency is in terms of their relationships with humans and other non-human objects. Jane Bennett, in 'Vibrant Matter' (2010) does not describe what objects and things are, as this would be a narrow human-centred categorisation, instead, like many other New Materialist thinkers, she explores what they *do*. This is a pertinent question with which to frame a discussion of the wig's participation within networks or relational conditions, and a way of capturing its ability to provoke both effects and affects. Much of Chapter One outlined the relationships between wig and body, so here I briefly re-cap, and expand from the position of New Materialist theory.

Firstly, there is the notion of objects – particularly objects that are commodities – having a biography or a 'social life' (Appadurai, 1986: 3) through their complex interactions with human lives (Miller, 2005:5), or through the consideration paid to the way all things (materials) can be active agents or 'actors' in the shaping of human behaviours or characters as in Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (1991; 2007). Wigs might manifest degrees of independence or vitality depending on the context in which they function. These contexts, or relationships (subject/object relations) could be referred to as networks, as assemblages or, by the term I prefer, relational conditions, and relate to how the wig functions in conjunction with the human body (its intended purpose) in a number of different ways.

So, by using the framework of relational conditions to map socially embedded values and networks of relationships that form our understanding

[17] I am using the word "object" in a generic sense here, and many of the writers I cite do use the words objects and things interchangeably. I go on to differentiate my use of the words "objects" and "things" in Section Two. I am also acknowledging here that some objects are commodities rather than "natural" forming objects like rocks, leaves or even wind, and these objects have more map-able subject/object relations. Where I have cited other writers I have specified in the text if and how they distinguish between objects and things.

of women's wigs, I am able to identify ways in which these relationships facilitate (or create conditions for) the wig to affect the body (i.e. demonstrate a degree of agency).

For example, we might understand a wig in relation to the human body as a "symbol" or object that usually undertakes a well understood social, performative or contextual function: they are predominantly worn to affirm, reaffirm, exaggerate or disguise some aspect of a wearer's identity, or to project a new one. Women's wigs also have a particular ability to project and exaggerate the feminine, and, like hair, can be perceived as a signifier of gender, or even act as a synecdoche for the female body. So, the wig might operate in relation to the rest of the body as a signifier of gender. Wearing a wig enables a change of the physical makeup of the wearing body; it re-configures the body's surfaces quite significantly. To explore this point further: a wig might be all it takes to "transform" the body's appearance from a man to a woman (and vice versa), a brunette to a blonde, effecting all the cultural baggage that accompanies these changes. It can bestow some kind of value on the body, so it becomes more youthful, richer, sexier.

A wig "participates" in relationships with other things and I have briefly mapped the way it mediates gender and identity as it brings about a change in the appearance of the body, effecting the ways in which the body is perceived (and categorised). Is a wig passive in this scenario? No, although its agency is not intentional or human-like. Harvey and Knox, paraphrasing Latour argue that 'the agency of things […] simply refers to the ways in which specific material configurations are actively engaged in shaping relations and in that sense, are social actors' (Harvey and Knox, 2014:6).

The wig in the relational conditions I have outlined above, demonstrates a kind of agency in terms of how it contributes to re-shaping the visual configuration of the body. I would classify these relationships as human-centred, and linked to the way that objects like wigs are configured or understood through their use within societal and cultural frameworks. A slightly different way to look at agency, or the independence of objects in

shaping human behaviour, is through the idea that certain objects "invite you in" or "call forth" through their form or/and materials, or their affordances.

Psychologist James Gibson conceived the term 'affordance' to theorise the 'action possibilities' of the environment, in relation to the physical capacities of the subject (1979:172). Jonas Larsen (2008:146) argues that Gibson's concept of affordance is limiting as it is independent of culture. Larsen proposes that Donald Norman's (1988) definition of 'perceived' affordances is more useful in that they 'depend upon intentions, cultural knowledge and past experiences […] Normanian affordance is the design aspect of an object that determines just how the thing could possibly be used' (Larsen, 2008:146). For example, a wig's form 'affords' certain conventional performances, it invites us to wear it on our heads, but it is also possible to wear it over our face, or even wrap it round some other part of our body, or to put it on an object. In short, an object's affordances depend on one's past experiences and the imaginative potential of that object, but an object's design will encourage a more culturally scripted use. Affordances could be considered a more physical set of relational conditions.

In a similar vein Robin Bernstein, in her essay 'Dances with Things' (2009) discusses the way that things 'hail the body'[18] and demand a bodily response (Bernstein, 2009:73). One of her examples is of the way a wooden cut-out of a social caricature, designed as a kind of "set" for a photograph, structured the actions of the human body; the woman in the example arranged her body in response to the space created by the cut-out or 'thing'. Bernstein claims that 'in this dense interaction between thing and human, the caricature scripted the woman's performance' (Bernstein, 2009:68).

[18] This use of the term "hail" follows Althusser's (1970) theory of interpellation, i.e., when subjects are "hailed" by ideological state apparatuses such as religion or the nuclear family so that they recognise themselves within these and become more compliant as a result.

She continues by arguing that objects that 'hail the body' are 'bounded spaces' that do allow for play or transgression (2009:77), this implies that there are a multiplicity of "scripted" configurations between body and thing, and this could prompt "proper" performances or transgressive performances; in her example of fairground cartoon cut-outs, traditional gender roles are reversed or subverted in a variety of ways (Bernstein, 2009:81).

Wigs can function in a similar way. A wig can 'hail' the body, interpolating it into an ideology of feminine beauty (for example), and it can be considered as a 'bounded space': its flexible material properties (and the semiotic associations of its "hair style") allow a multiplicity of 'scripted' configurations, or relational conditions that might represent a number of different body/thing/gendered positions. Wigs also allow a number of 'transgressive performances' or ways to 'resist the script' (to use Bernstein's words), especially around the signalling or identification of gender.

What is interesting about these theories is the idea that the agency might reside in the form and/or materials of the object. Objects like wigs commonly exude a pull that we respond to, they contain a body shaped hole that we have learned how to fill. Clearly this is the intention of the designer or manufacturer, it is the subversive or the transgressive use, that, for me, opens up possibilities to see it beyond its associations with the body and the transformation of appearance, even though both Bernstein, and Gibson acknowledge the limits of this. An aim of this research (without changing the form of the actual wig) is to explore if it is possible photographically to shift and expand the wig's relational conditions by subverting its 'scripted performances' or 'affordances'.

Lisa LeFeuvre in conversation with artist Cornelia Parker commented that placing a thing in language (by describing it or explaining it) makes elements of it disappear (LeFeuvre and Parker, 2008). This comment made me think about the wig, and the way it almost disappears when worn on the body (it merges, it becomes part of a new body/wig assemblage), and how we articulate its meanings based on a language framework; the result being that

we can only “see” it in quite prescriptive ways. Morris and Sayler in their essay ‘Photography and Fossils’ have a similar view. Writing about objects in a museum collection they argue that, ‘When we draw something close with interpretation and a determination of its exact significance, we lose that essential distance, call it an exoticism, in which we can feel our own selves made strange through the interaction’ (2017: np).

The problems discussed above are problems related to the desire to pin down or categorise objects. By rationalising objects through language or affordances we lose sight of their other potential possibilities, we are less likely to be surprised by them. I was surprised by wigs and hairpieces when I encountered them on the streets because of their disembodiment; their more usual affordances had been suppressed. As I have discussed in the Introduction and in Chapter One, their materiality still vibrated and provoked a range of associations in me, but it was the wigs transformed through the photograph that surprised me more. The photograph did not diminish the mystery of the wig, it actually exaggerated it through the effects of framing and flattening. I have returned to this initial discovery throughout this research in order to explore how my continued use of photographic methods can evoke the feeling of being disorientated by an object like a wig.

There are clear limitations to photography, particularly regarding the suppression of the wig’s three-dimensionality and materiality (although I am replacing one materiality for another through exploring the photographic surface), despite this, the camera and photographic processes can do things that other mediums cannot. For example, the way that photography engenders an indexical connection to a physical wig means that I can make the wig in my photographs look like actual shop-bought wigs, suggesting a physical, material wig, as opposed to an artist’s interpretation of a wig (as in Margarita Gluzberg’s drawings). This makes it easier for me to argue for my use of a photograph as a stand-in for an actual wig (I discuss the implications of this in Chapter Three). It exploits our tendency to look *through* the photographic frame to the object depicted, and suggests that manipulations I

make to the photograph *may* be perceived as properties of an actual physical wig (in parallel with the photographic surface).

Through decisions about lighting, posing and framing, the camera itself can also create particular viewing conditions; it can make something visible, but equally it can make aspects of something invisible too. These are all methods that I can use to pictorially shift some of the relational conditions of the wig away from our rational understanding of it into what Morris and Sayler (2017:np) call feeling ourselves ‘made strange’ by our encounter with it.

Photography involves the production of an image that can be copied, multiplied, enlarged and miniaturised. It is this seemingly straightforward property (or affordance) of photography that I employed to manipulate the wig’s effect and affect on the viewer during a studio exhibition of ‘Wigs’ in 2017 [fig. 13]. This was one of the simplest ways of subtly subverting a wig’s perceived affordances, thus shifting the relational conditions between body and wig.

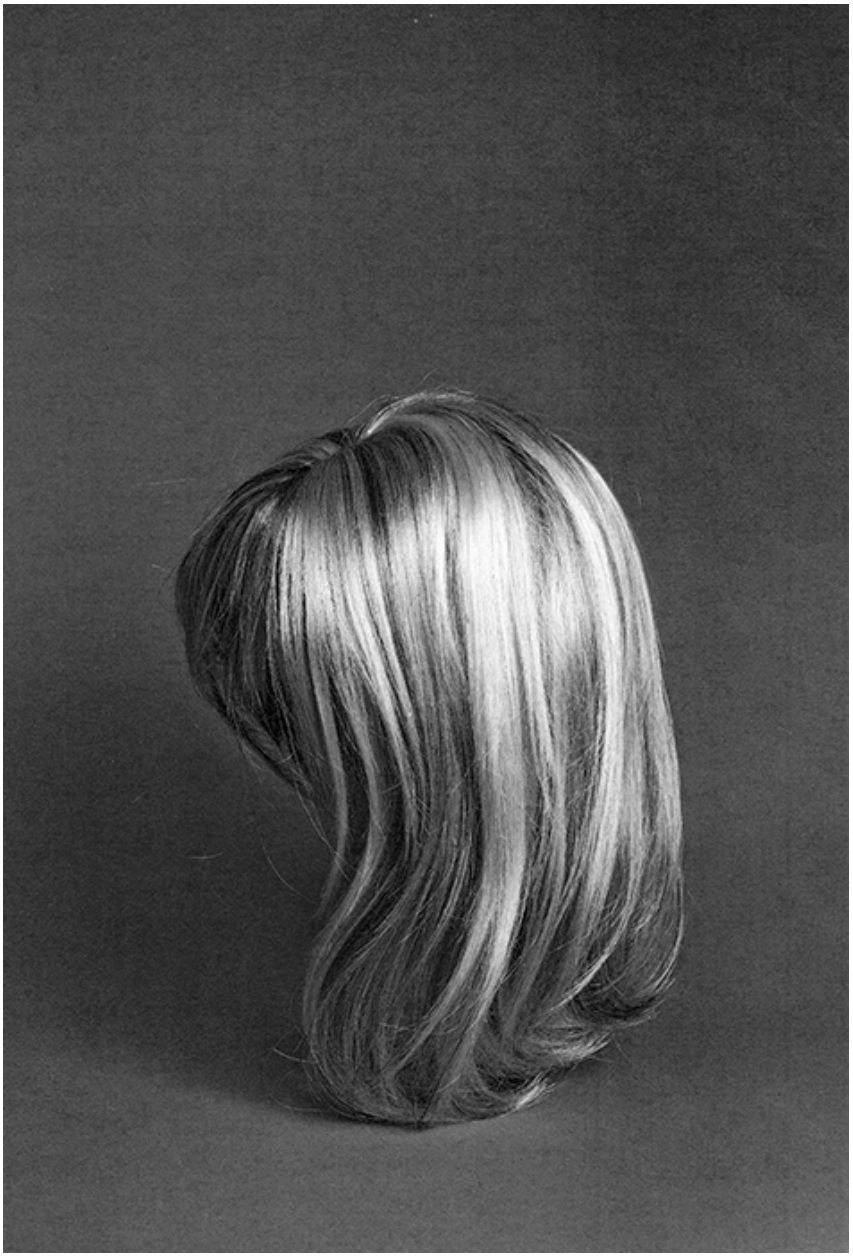

Fig. 13, Eyre, Sarah ‘Wigs’, (2012- 2017)

Enlarged to at least double life-size, the photographed wig takes on monstrous proportions, and what is immediately apparent to the viewer, especially up close, is the volume of female hair. The intended effect of viewing the enlarged image rather than an image scaled to the human head is one of engulfment or the feeling that the hair is enfolding or consuming the body. The wigs photographed were copies of female hairstyles so the final prints, like the work of Alice Maher and Emma Hart discussed in Chapter One, also connote an excess of female-ness, an excess of corporeality which

might provoke a feeling of repulsion, shame or disgust because at this scale the wig could take on an abject or grotesque quality.

The wig's form (its recognisable wigness) remained unchanged, but the implications of an excess of hair caused by the change in scale and medium shifted the conventional relational conditions between the viewer's body and the wig, resulting in the notion that wigs can evoke an uncomfortable and more threatening kind of affective 'charge' (or agency) as their object status becomes less dependent on their conventional use. It was also the uncanny doubling of the photograph's indexical trace with the actual object (the wig), combined with the change in scale that gave the resulting photographs an unsettling vitality.

It is not uncommon to be disturbed or made to feel strange by a wig, and I have explored the reasons for this in detail in Chapter One. 'Wigs' played with established ideas about how we are culturally conditioned to react with anxiety to the sight of such things as excess hair and giant wigs. This work also reveals some of the ways that photography can be used to reconfigure relational conditions between wigs and bodies in order to make palpable the potential agency of an object. This is achieved by the way that the object is framed, and through scale and placement of the photographic print in relation to the viewer.

2.2 Thingyfying the Wig

In order to make the shift from object to "thing" more pronounced, the wig's more functional affordances (the wig in 'Wigs' is clearly an artefact that is worn on the head) needed to be suppressed; the wig needed to be made strange. As I have outlined in Chapter One, we understand and categorise wigs in relation to the body, so to re-frame a wig as a thing it needs to be disembodied visually and conceptually. By doing this I aimed to de-stabilise the way the wig is categorised: to refer to something as a thing is to acknowledge that there is some uncertainty about what it is, or what it is for.

For Jane Bennett, 'thing-power' describes the way that 'objects appeared as things, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics' (Bennett, 2010:5). It has to be noted that Bennett only applies her term to 'fixed entities' (Bennett, 2010:xvii), she paraphrases W.J.T. Mitchell's (2005) comment, 'objects are the way things appear to a subject-that is, with a name, an identity, a gestalt or stereotypical template. ...Things, on the other hand, ... [signal] the moment when the object becomes the Other' (Bennett, 2010:2). It is this shift or movement from stable object to some*thing* alien and strange (and that may look back at us) that is the compelling part of thing-power for me.

An object, because of its specificity, can be part of subject/object relational conditions, in the sense that these can be mapped, as I have done in Section 2.1. Things, by their very nature, are harder to categorise, they are ontologically slippery, porous even. 'As they circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture, above all, what they disclose about us), but we only catch a glimpse of things', argues Bill Brown (2001:4). [19]

[19] Brown's ideas about the differences between things and objects are not new. Comparing Brown's essay with Heidegger's 'Tool Theory' in 'Being and Time' (1962:98) there is a correlation between

> We look through objects because there are codes by which our interpretive attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts […] a thing, in contrast, can hardly function as a window. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us (Brown, 2001:4).

Indeed, even when we are using a thing, we still might not notice it, it works invisibly. Heidegger illustrates this concept with a hammer (Heidegger, 1927:98), but it could also apply to wigs. If a wig is being worn (its intended function) we might look at it and notice the hairstyle (its function in relation to humans) and the wearer beneath (we would see someone wearing a wig attempting to express or hide some aspect of their personality through it). Brown might say we were looking at the wig as an object; Heidegger would say the wig is 'ready-to-hand' (1927:98), it works on us invisibly; and our understanding of it is limited to its function, its use. However, we would not be seeing the wig in its own right (as a "thing"), contemplating it, in Heidegger's terms, as 'present-at-hand' (1927:99).

Brown (following Heidegger) argues that when objects become things, they enter in to a different kind of subject-object relationship. They can be specific yet ambiguous, they are in a state of liminality, uncertain and 'hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable' (Brown, 2001:5). A thing cannot be pinned down semiotically or through its relational conditions, it is more than its material parts, and its edges are hard to define. A thing then, drops outside of object categorisation, it becomes a puzzle. When its function is unclear, or its subject-object relational conditions unfathomable, a thing's interiority can be better explored

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Heidegger's 'ready-to-hand' thing and Brown's 'object', and his 'present-at-hand' thing and Brown's 'thing'. Using the word 'thing' more broadly, Heidegger argued that to perceive a thing through its outer appearance, or through its usefulness to humans is reductive, and that there is always more to a thing than we actually see. However, for Heidegger, a thing has an element of invisibility to it; for much of the time, when we are not using a thing, it steps back and we stop noticing it. Heidegger calls this "withdrawal" (1962:99).

or penetrated, as the cultural surface has been shifted (maybe only subtly) or re-configured. [20]

Turning an object like a wig into a “thing” presents an opportunity for a conceptual re-shaping or a physical re-shaping (or both) of the thing itself, and the relational conditions it functions within. In terms of a wig this could mean anything from wearing it on your knees to cutting it up, and there are myriad ways one could use photography to change or alter the context of a wig. For the wig to be considered a “thing”, it needs to be loosened from all of its social, cultural and semiotic associations (in other words “de-figured”). In a photographic context, this might mean that the wig needs to lose some of its material visibility; aspects that reveal its function or its affordances need to be concealed. It needs to become less visible as a wig in order to draw out its latent thingness. To ensure that the wig more fully emerges as a thing in my practice I developed a series of sculptural and photographic methods that I have termed as to “thingyfy”.

In order to thingyfy the wig, in the next series of photographs, ‘Furl’, I made the decision to photographically detach the wig from the wearer by moving away from the styles and stereotypes that shop-bought wigs represented. I chose to do this through moulding, sculpting and creating new forms from the wig, without altering it too much, but enough to remove the suggestion of wearing (hinted at by the “poses” in ‘Wigs’). I continued to develop my thingyfying strategies [fig. 14] by placing the wig horizontally on the photographic set, and using a landscape format frame.

Linda Nochlin discusses the horizontal plane in relation to the body and disembodiment. Discussing the work of Géricault, she argues that by laying heads out flat, he ‘consigns the mutilated heads to the realm of the object’,

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[20] That is not to say that people can’t still consider things as sites of memory and significance, but that would be something personal and unique to a specific person, I am making points about objects /things more generally.

and the effect of this is a resemblance to ‘meat on a butcher’s counter’ (Nochlin, 1995:21-22). I have used this strategy to negate the urge to embody the wig as one might do with a wig positioned or posed in an upright (bodily) form, and as a way of suppressing its wearability. A wig without a wearer (or displayed on a form that suggests a wearer) is incomplete, so in that sense it has already shifted into the realm of things. This shift in position has also removed its ability to transform the appearance of the body, through its relationship with the face and head.

Fig.14, Sarah Eyre, Untitled ‘work in progress’ from the series ‘Furl’, (2014)

Figure 14 shows an image from the ‘Furl’ series that maintains some connection to a body (although not necessarily a human one) through its suggestion of both internal and external associations of flesh. The folded wig is corporeal but the overall shape and the fishnet surface evoke fleshier and more visceral associations, reinforced by the net holding it together and the raw meat colour of the background. There is a connection to Sarah Lucas’s 2010 ‘Nuds’ in this image, and it shares some of the associations evoked in Helen Chadwick’s 1991 piece ‘Loop my Loop’ [fig.15]. Chadwick’s image

makes the blonde hair repulsive by twisting it with intestinal tubes, and this juxtaposition challenges our understanding of both objects: both are from the body, but neither in their proper place. The difference in my piece is that the concepts of interiority and exteriority come together simultaneously in one object: the folded wig.

Fig. 15 Helen Chadwick, ‘Loop my Loop’, (1991), Cibachrome transparency, glass, steel, electrical apparatus, 127 x 76 x 15 cm

The ‘Furl’ series drew together some of the issues I explored in Chapter One: the associative and transformative qualities of materials, the visual confusion surrounding materials and objects encountered out of context, and the disruption of boundaries between interior and exterior. Yet, I felt that the

series of images focused too much on the sculptural manipulation of the wigs, rather than the capacity for photographic methods to thingyfy the wig.

So, my next stage was to move beyond photographing moulded wigs to moulding or re-shaping photographs of (already moulded) wigs. I did this through various means: photocopying, cutting, folding and staging [figs 16 & 17]. All of this served to increase the degree to which the subject becomes a “thing” (non-functioning) rather than an “object” (functioning), which is another way of re-positioning or re-configuring the wig’s subject/object relational conditions.

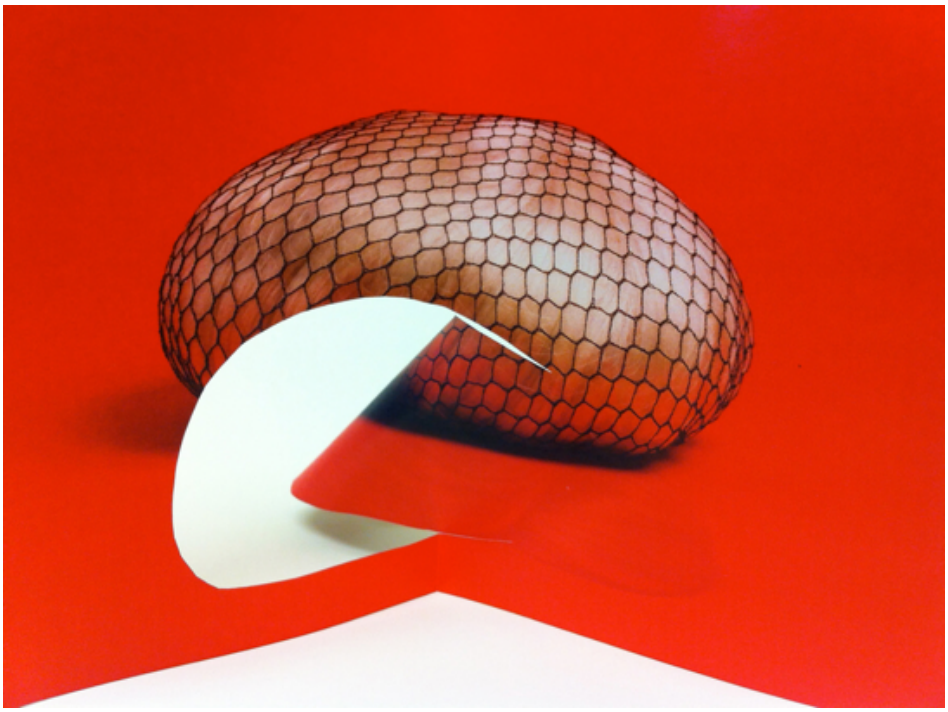


Fig. 16, Sarah Eyre, Untitled from the series ‘Paper Furl’ (2014)

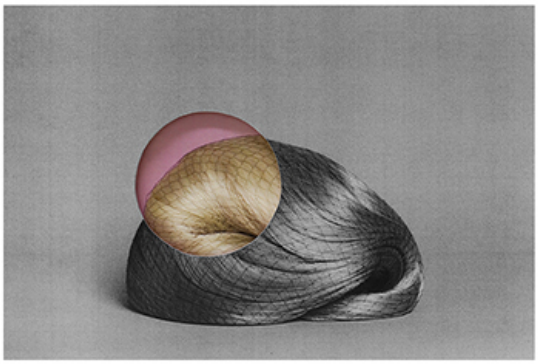
Although various types of manipulation were conducted on the image, the most critical transformation, for me, was the one brought about by the act of cutting, as the gesture of cutting moves the photograph away from the status of image into object, and then to thing.

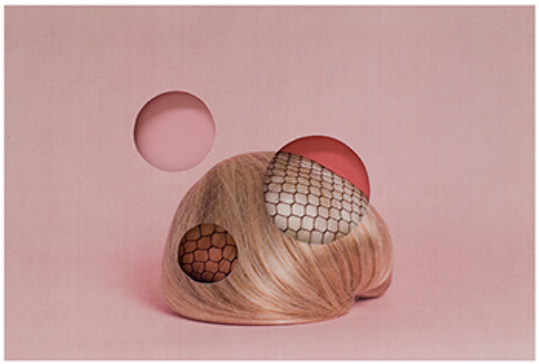
Fig. 17, Sarah Eyre, Untitled from the series ‘Paper Furl’ (2014)

Roland Barthes likens a photograph to a ‘transparent envelope’ in the sense that we have a tendency to look into the subject that it represents (Barthes, 1980:5). On being cut, we are reminded that a photograph also has a surface and a material form. If the image depicted in the photograph is cut, as it has been in my work, then I believe that it is read differently; the cut becomes part of the surface of the photograph and it can become absorbed into the object depicted (albeit in quite a brutal way). In the case of the experiments for the work ‘Paper Furl’ (fig. 16), the wig represented is thing-like, as is the actual photograph of it. The cut becomes even more important in the following body of work, ‘Copy / Cut / Paste’ and I analyse this method of using the cut to thingyfy the photograph in Chapter Three.

A more controlled, circular cut became an integral method in the making of the next stage of the work. This offered a strategy for opening the wig in a visual sense; a way of penetrating the surface of the image to suggest that the wig, itself a surface, might have a sense of interiority, or hidden depths (in fact the word ‘penetralia’ means the hidden bowels of a building). The circular hole (with its association with orifices and portals) reinforces the gesture of boring into or penetrating a surface or object. It was also a method of collapsing the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the wig.

As a way of reinforcing the idea of interiority I began to experiment with layering other images underneath the holes (keeping a slight shadow to highlight the hole) [figs 18 & 19]. The images I used in the layering and montage process are in fact other wigs, but the way they are folded and held together by the netting alludes to meat, or flesh. The wig's insides, like the body's internal organs, are generally concealed, so like the title 'Penetralia' suggests, I am revealing the "bowels" of the wig.





Figs 18 & 19 Sarah Eyre, 'Untitled' from the series 'Penetralia', (2015), Giclée prints on rag paper, 29 x 21 cm

With these photographs I was attempting to suggest a penetration of the surface of the wig, through physically penetrating the surface of the photograph. The aim of this work was to disrupt the wig's usual 'relational conditions' – to thingyfy it – as a way of revealing other aspects or sides to it; or in other words, evoking a visual suggestion of a wig slip. In this case, the slippage reveals a hairy, fleshy and corporeal interior.

I tried to keep some kind of surface integrity to the wig, so that it is still recognisable as a wig, whilst changing the way we usually think of it as something that is worn on the head. I have done this by making an even stronger connection with the body, by making visual connections between the wig's imagined interior and the body's interior. An important question at this stage of the research is, are the wigs in these images demonstrating agency? No, I do not think agency is the right concept at this stage. What the images do imply is that whilst wigs cannot necessarily transform themselves,

they can be made to appear more porous, which is a way of destabilising them and un-fixing them from their more usual relational conditions.

This body of work successfully conveyed my intentions, and in this sense, I consider it to be a resolved body of work. Although, its completion has led to further questions relating to photography. The making of the 'Penetralia' series revealed that the various processes that make a photograph (including the role of the photographer) can also be considered within a New Materialist framework. A photograph is like any other object, in the sense that it becomes involved in relationships with other non-human and human actants. Edwards and Hart draw on the material turn in anthropology (Gell, 1998) to argue that objects, such as photographs, can be seen as 'social actors' and their 'social effects' influence social relationships and actions in ways that would not be possible if they did not exist (Edwards and Hart, 2004:4). A photograph, like any other object, has a social biography and as such, 'cannot be fully understood at any single point in its existence but should be understood as belonging in a continuing process of production, exchange, usage and meaning' (Edwards and Hart, 2004:4). Photographs are not passive objects waiting for us to enliven them, they have the potential for agency; or as Jane Bennett would say, 'vibrancy', or 'thing power'[21] (Bennett, 2010:vii).

This positions the photograph and photographic processes as far more entangled within networks of relational conditions than popular assumptions about photography imply. Like many other examples that one can analyse through a New Materialist lens, the different relational conditions and processes that constitute a photograph are invisible. Jonas Larsen argues that the act of 'photograph*ing'* (italics in the original) is absent from most photographic theory, which goes 'directly to the representational worlds of

[21] Jane Bennett doesn't differentiate between objects and things in the same way as Bill Brown, she calls everything a 'thing', so for her, 'thing power' is the term she uses to denote that all things can manifest agency. I outline a definition in Section 2.4.

photographs and skip over their production, movement and circulation'. He positions photography as 'a technological complex with specific affordances and a set of embodied social practices or performances' (Larsen, 2008: 143). James Hevia makes a similar point: 'the image has been given precedence and ontological priority over other elements which temporally precede or follow upon it' (2009: 80).

More recently new media theorists such as Daniel Rubinstein and Joanna Zylinska have taken a similarly critical stance on the representational and human centred focus of much of the debates on photography. Zylinska comments that:

> Human-driven photography – involving an act of conscious looking through a viewfinder or at an LCD screen – is only one small part of what takes place in the field of photography, even though it is often made to stand in for photography as such (Zylinska, 2016:132).

Rubinstein acknowledges that the invisibility of the different forces that constitute photography mean that the image depicted on the surface of the photograph is assumed to be an exact correlation with the subject.[22] He asserts that

> The danger in this way of thinking is that it determines photography as a discourse about exterior events; dominated entirely by the force of signification rather than by its own materiality. Questions are always asked about what the image is of, and what does it say about the state of the world, and this precludes submitting representation itself to radical critique (Rubinstein, 2016:337).

Rubinstein is arguing that by only seeing photography as a creator of 'visual surfaces' (2016:337) we limit our understanding of photographs to a transparent surface, like a window, to be looked through, to be understood only through the interpretive framework of the indexical connection to past

[22] Lorna Simpson's work, discussed in Chapter One, draws attention to this through questioning the correlation between the body's surface appearance and identity and photography.

events. Like Hevia and Larsen he argues, ‘Photography can function successfully as representation precisely because the qualities that account for its own production are generally excluded from the content of the image’ (Rubinstein, 2016:353).

Lyle Rexer uses the term ‘looking with’, as in ‘Photography is not a looking at or a looking through but a looking with’ (Rexer, 2009:11). He argues that the camera does not give us an unmediated view of its subject. Rexer’s term resonates with me because it acknowledges that the camera itself (its ocular system) has a degree of agency in the way photographic images are made. I thought about this term a lot during this stage of my research, and I think the idea of ‘looking with’ can be expanded to take on a New Materialist (and non-representational) interpretation, in the sense that photography and its associated processes (including the photographer), is an assemblage, or a collaboration of different forces or actants that all contribute toward bringing a photograph into being.

What is clear from this collection of arguments is that the concept we understand as photography is layered, and comprises of a multitude of dynamic processes, networks and implications that simply are not visible on the surface, or indeed within the materiality of a photograph. Similarly to the wig (as discussed in Chapter One), these layers can be invisible or obscured and they allude to a deep complexity that surrounds the flat surface of the photograph. The methods I discuss in Chapter Three attempt to materialise these invisible layers on the surface of the photograph.

2.3 The Excessive Wig

Jane Bennett's ideas explore the agency of objects by removing (and decentring) human agency. Bennett splits her definition of 'material vibrancy' – in other words, agency – into two terms: 'thing-power' and 'the out-side' (Bennett, 2010:xvi). 'Thing-power', as I have already discussed, broadly means the 'ability of ordinary, man-made items' to go beyond their status as objects and to 'manifest traces of independence or aliveness' that lies *outside* of our (human) intervention or agency. Bennett's term 'out-side' refers to the way that things can exceed their ontological categories (Bennett, 2010:5), she positions them 'out-side' our human centred relation conditions. Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox refer to this as 'excess' (Harvey and Knox, 2014:10), and Bill Brown defines excess as 'what remains physically or metaphysically irreducible to objects' (Brown, 2001:5). Graham Harman also talks about the object's 'excess' or 'surplus', meaning anything beyond its 'constituent pieces' or that can't be reduced to its effects on the world, in other words its relational conditions (Harman, 2018:49 & 51). All acknowledge that objects have "something else", something out of reach and un-graspable, withheld and invisible.

This way of thinking about objects, in my opinion, can cover a wide spectrum; at one end would be an object whose meaning or "reality" has transformed due to a change of relational conditions or human/object contexts (the most obvious might be an object being used for another purpose; a wig used to mop the floor for example). At the other end of the spectrum sit theories such as Harman's 'Object Orientated Ontology', that posit the idea that we can never truly 'know' an object; that objects always withhold and that it is beyond our human capabilities to map these parts of the object (Harman, 2018:12). They remain mysterious, not just in their interactions with humans, but in their interactions with other non-human objects too. Of course, hints of these 'withheld' qualities can seep out when an object is re-framed as a thing.

Throughout this chapter I have acknowledged that there are many ways in which we can identify a wig's transformative qualities through its relationships with the human-object. I have also explored how subtly subverting, or shifting relational conditions between wigs and bodies can engender new or different understandings of wigs and their agency. These are all based on relationships and situations that are tangible, and observable (even if this has been in an art context). Wigs, as I have discussed in Chapter One, are complex socially and materially entangled objects that provoke bodily reactions that cannot be fully explained by their relational conditions. Here I propose the idea that there is an invisible side – or interiority – to wigs, an excess or surplus which may materialise in the imaginative and creative domain, and that might generate an unexpected kind of agency in relation to the body.

The idea of "excess" in relation to the wigs could refer to the uncanny or abject emotional affect wigs can provoke when encountered in a disembodied state (as discussed in Section 2.2 and in Chapter One). This bodily anxiety might also arise in response to the unknown origins of the wig's materials. In both these examples the agency or "excess" are still human-centred; we are culturally conditioned to respond in certain ways, but the effect on us is harder to articulate and categorise. My point is that in these scenarios, wigs demonstrate degrees of agency or aliveness that are not related to affordances, or their usual functions. It is as if they are haunted, and have the ability to haunt us, hence the excess; their agency is demonstrated through their affect.

As my research progressed, I wanted to develop visual methods that penetrated deeper into the wig in order to reveal a glimpse of their mysterious and withheld side, in other words their thingness. Just as the excess or surplus qualities of an object can be difficult to grasp, they are also to some extent invisible, so I have taken a more imaginative and speculative approach when developing my methods. The 'Penetralia' photographs hinted at the shadowy depths enclosed within the wig, but the methods developed for that project were about the act of penetration itself (as a way of

destabilising the object). By employing the visual and conceptual metaphor of wig slips, I frame the wig as a surface; but a surface that might slip to reveal other layers and depths. I also extend this proposition to the photograph. As I have outlined in Chapter One, wigs and photographs share similarities, especially in terms of slippages that can occur between their surface depictions and what they are (and how they function). In Chapter Three I outline methods that more clearly interrogate the surface of the photograph alongside the wig.

The wig's excess, which I imagine as coming from somewhere deep inside the wig, has qualities that are very similar to the uncanny. My first body of work, 'Wigs', employed some of Freud's tropes of the uncanny: the severed head, the double, the visual link an upright wig has to a doll or mannequin, and the uncertainty about what one is looking at – a body, a doll or just a wig. The way that I positioned and photographed[23] the wigs created a context for an uncanny response from the viewer [see fig.2 & 20].

[23] The use of black & white laser prints removes any kind of contemporary or vernacular or ordinary context, the object is floating around in a timeless fashion. The positions of the upright wig are posed to suggest a human like gesture, but we can clearly see the bottom of the wig so we know it can only be an object. The images, when exhibited were enlarged slightly larger than life and hung at average head level to reinforce the encounter with something more than just a wig.

Fig. 20, Sarah Eyre ‘Wigs’ (2012 - 2017)

David Bate (2003:39), discussing Freud (1919), argues that the uncanny can be evoked ‘by effacing distinctions between imagination and reality, creating an *intellectual uncertainty’* (my italics). The uncanny can also mean something that eludes categories or slips between one thing and another: we know it is a wig, yet it looks like something else. The uncanny is not a framework used by Bennett, Harman or Harvey and Knox, although, there are aspects of the uncanny that could equally apply to an “excessive” or surplus quality to objects.

Nicolas Royle (2003:2) comments that the uncanny ‘disturbs any straightforward sense of what is inside and what is outside. The uncanny has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality’. Again, this could apply to the experience of encountering an object’s excessive qualities; for example, we know what it is, and know how we should respond, yet the object’s edges are not quite definable or graspable.

The differences between excessiveness and the uncanny, in my opinion, are that the uncanny is evoked by the associations that the objects create, a recognition that might not be possible to articulate, but could reside in the unconscious. One could argue that because the uncanny is associated with repressed memories or other objects, it is a cultural condition, that is, external to the object. Whereas with ‘excess’ (according to Harman and Harvey and Knox) the object contains its excessiveness within, regardless of whether there is a subject. It does not rely on our associations with other objects or feelings, it is something that is part of the object, and there, whether we can identify it or not.

Conclusion

In Chapter One I discussed the wig as a social object, and framed its effects through the way that it has been socially and materially constituted. The body was very much at the centre of these relational conditions, and the wig's capacity to unsettle could be framed through the uncanny or the abject. This chapter has taken a more divergent approach to the wig by framing it and its various qualities through a New Materialist lens in order to explore how objects could demonstrate agency, and have porous boundaries in the sense that they can become entangled in many different relational conditions. I also argued that thingyfying an object – revealing its latent thingness – draws attention to the idea that a familiar object can become unfamiliar and strange.

Shifting the wig from a stable object to an unstable and in-between thing conceptually and visually (through my practice) is a way of making it unstable. I argue that photography is an ideal method for this thingyfying because it transforms the wig into a *thing* with a different set of relational conditions (or networks) through the way that it can be copied, scaled, changed-colour, and converted into a two-dimensional photo-wig-thing. Moving beyond what can be done with the camera, I started to explore how the photographic surface could be thingyfied by cutting, folding and layering my photographs of folded wigs. The effect of these strategies was the implication that the wig might be withholding a fleshy, corporeal interior which in itself is disturbing. I used the cut and the fold as a way of evoking the concept of the wig slip; by penetrating the surface of the photograph I was revealing a slippage between surface, or exterior, and what these might be concealing underneath. This not only causes us to question what we know about the wig, but also the surface of the photograph too, and these are themes that I explore in more depth in my next body of work discussed in Chapter Three.

Graham Harman (2018:50) would argue that we can never fully know an object, that its excess or surplus is always withdrawn from us. This is an interesting idea, but it leaves me at a dead end, and means that an object's

agency outside of human-centred relational conditions cannot be seen. Far more useful is the idea that an object's excess, and potential agency can be explored not through a removal of the human in its relational conditions, but a significant *de-centring* of the human in its relational conditions. As I move forward with my practice, I have found that I am still interested in the wig's relationship with the body, and I think there are creative methodological frameworks that allow me to reconfigure wig/body relations in very unexpected ways. This brings me back to Jane Bennett's idea of thing power, and her claim that we can catch a glimpse of things (2010:5). Developing a context where the latent thingness of an object can be drawn out (without totally obliterating its edges) would allow us a way of re-framing how we think about our relationship with those objects.

In Chapter Three I have outlined a more flexible methodological framework using a combination of New Materialism and the uncanny. As I have already identified in Section 2.3, they are similar but also very different in their theorising of subject/object relations. I also argue that the uncanny, which can be evoked by visual associations could be a useful tool in continuing to develop photography and collage methods to focus on the wig's and the photograph's edges (both real and metaphoric), layers and imagined depths. This involves visually destabilising the wig and the photograph in order to make them appear *more* porous and that they might contain layers and depths under their surfaces. Ian Monroe argues that collage (by which he means the method of cutting, re-arranging and pasting material) offers a way of exploring the intermingling of distinct elements, to help us 'to re-assign boundaries and shift our assumptions concerning the nature of "being" and our relationship to the external world' (Monroe, 2008:36). In this chapter I focused on the theoretical and visual ways the wig (and to some extent the photograph) could be thingyfied, or made strange and unstable, and in the next chapter I extend my methods and thinking in order to consider how our encounter with the object can make us strange and porous.

Chapter Three: Making the Surface Strange

Introduction

Throughout this thesis I have touched on some of the ontological connections between the wig and the photograph. In this chapter I expand on these connections more fully in order to develop an expanded visual methodology which has provided a framework for the development of a final body of work, ‘Copy / Cut / Paste’.

This chapter outlines the strategies I have developed in order to suggest that the surface of the photograph (and by association, the surface of the wig) is porous and malleable, and capable of concealing and revealing layers and depths. Through cutting and layering techniques, I have re-shaped the photograph in order to make it strange, and therefore a dynamic place to imply that objects, things and surfaces exceed their boundaries. I also return to the metaphor of slippage; the wig slip (or visual slip of the tongue) as a way of drawing attention to the notion that these surfaces are in flux, and could slip at any moment. To imply that the surfaces are concealing something might suggest that there is some kind of interior, or layers under the surface. Revealing layers and depths where one might not expect to see them is how I make my photographic surfaces uncanny and unsettling. The unsettling surface (or object) may make us unstable too, as Elizabeth B. Silva has commented, ‘There is something in the presence of an unsettling object that disturbs, renders unstable, agitates or decomposes the knowledge, perspectives and emotions of those who encounter it’ (Silva, 2014:184).

Elizabeth Sassoon considers ‘a photograph as a multi-layered laminated object in which meaning is derived from a symbiotic relationship between materiality, content and context’ (Sassoon, 2004:199). It is this notion of a

photograph as a multi-layered object that has been useful in the development of my photographic methods. Additionally, the similarities between photographs and wigs are quite apparent in this statement. I also consider a wig to be a multi-layered object, and the implication of this is that both might be capable of concealing layers under their surface; layers that can be penetrated, prised apart, re-shaped, and re-configured.

To contemplate a photograph in similar terms to a wig means to make it equally as visible and present through its materiality and its surface. In this final body of work, I develop methods that stretch, layer and merge the edges, and suggested depths, between the material and visual image elements of the photograph in order to challenge our understanding of its flatness. This results in a destabilising collapse of the boundaries between the surface and the depth of the photograph, and the representational and metaphoric qualities of the wig. My practice positions photography, not just as a method of making a faithful reproduction of a wig, but also as a series of processes that can be unpicked, stretched and re-shaped. It is this latter quality of the medium that make it so suitable a tool for investigating a multi-layered and complex object such as the wig.

The title of the work, ‘Copy / Cut / Paste’, represents three of the different layers that are embedded in my photographic methodology; from the optic “capturing” of the wig, to the re-shaping of the resulting image and photograph through cutting and layering. Finally, a return to the optic framework collapse the layers of process. The title also relates to the way that I bring together, and prise apart, the material wig, the image of the wig, and the materiality of both the wig and the photograph.

Despite using a combination of digital, analogue and hand-made methods, I have quite consciously made reference to digital actions in the series title for several reasons. Firstly, copy, cut and paste relate to bodily gestures that effect the digital space, implying the hand of the operator. This is a subtle acknowledgement that there is an outside, and therefore edges, to images including the digital. The term also suggests similarities in gesture to the

manual cut and paste of collage, making apparent the transitions between digital and analogue in my practice. Digital editing software like Photoshop uses tools that are a virtual referent to an analogue photography space (for example, tools that dodge and burn refer to darkroom processes). My practice plays with these conventions by collapsing analogue and digital processes.

Secondly, the words suggest the layers of process by which a photograph is made, as opposed to taken. This implies a temporal and spatial element too; the photograph is not just formed from a "capture"; there are many other processes that bring it into being. Thirdly, there is something repetitive and unfixed about the copy, cut and paste actions, in the way that a digital document (text or image) is never fixed, it can always be re-opened and re-shaped and has the potential to materialise in many different forms, particularly in its algorithmic driven networked contexts (Rubinstein et al., 2013:10). The title then, suggests a way of thinking about the photographic image as something open-ended, unstable and unfixed. All photographic images are, in fact, continually in flux, whether that be through the processes of their making, their materiality, or the ways in which they circulate.

My own gestures of copying (using the camera to make a "copy" of the object; utilising a laser printer to make several print copies of an image), cutting (through framing and the manual cutting of photographic prints), and folding, are methods that open up different spaces and re-configure the edges that separate image, object and photographer (*and* digital and analogue spaces). They also separate out the different processes of shooting, developing, fixing, printing, and production and post-production. The wig is always in the frame, but the layers of process I have used to unpick the edges and layers of the photograph suggest that the wig, and the photograph can be peeled apart at the seams and brought back together in different ways.

'Copy', the first part of this chapter, outlines how I think photographically, in the sense that I use the camera to make a copy of the wig. In this section I

discuss in more detail the transformation from three-dimensional material wig to two-dimensional photographic version of the wig (from object to flat surface) through staging and framing. Rather than see the resulting photographs as just representations of the wig, I utilise the indexical trace the wig has with the photograph, and posit the idea that the photographs are embodied with wigness; they are still wigs but have shapeshifted into a different form. This form is photographic, so the new objects I create (through printing) are made from representations of wigs *and* photographs resulting in a kind of chimeric wig-photo "thing".

The second part, 'Cut', outlines how I deploy strategies of cutting and layering to open up the surface of the wig-photo object, and in turn, relates to the suggestion of cutting and opening up the wig and the photograph. I discuss the different kinds of spaces at play in the image. Cutting an image suggests that there might be something else underneath or behind the image. I analyse how the actions of cutting and layering re-figure the edges and surfaces of the wig and the photograph. Cutting also suggests a disruption of the photographic surface by removing parts of the image, or pictorial representation, and this in itself is a subversive thing to do to the image and the material of the photograph. The cut can also imply a wounding of the photograph and body, and also suggest a change of identity or a transformation which can be linked back to the transformation of the body, through wearing a wig or having a haircut.

Under discussion in the third part of the chapter is the 'Paste' stage, where the camera is used again to transform the resulting shallow reliefs back to surfaces. This produces different relationships between surface and space. This action smooths over the messiness of the cut and layering process. The photographic surface acts as a kind of container. This action is rather like the action of wearing a wig, as it is often a way of smoothing over the body; keeping the body in control, providing a coherent surface. The final photographic stage also provides a surface where the different process, materials and spaces overlap and co-inhabit.

3.1 Copy

There are different kinds of “copy” at play in my work. There are the wigs that I use which are copies of hairstyles, and copies of each other as they are mass produced, and they are synthetic copies of human hair. The wig poses I use, particularly in the series ‘Wigs’, copy a human gesture. I make several photocopies of my photographs to cut up, and I reuse and repeat certain fragments in different images.

The most significant kind of copy that I employ is the photograph. A photograph of a wig – if it is recognisable as a wig – could be considered a stand in for a real wig, like the way that a photograph of a person can be seen to be a *stand in* for that person. Much has been written about the way that the photograph, due to its indexical trace to the subject, can evoke a sense of physical closeness. Roland Barthes most famously summed this up in Camera Lucida:

> The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed (Barthes, 1980:80-81).

Furthermore, W. J. T. Mitchell argues that we anthropomorphise pictures (not just photographs) or embody them, because of the power of image depicted (he gives an example of our reluctance to deface a photograph of a loved one)[24]. He writes that, ‘pictures are things that have been marked with all the stigmata of personhood and animation: they exhibit both physical and virtual bodies; they speak to us, sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively’ (Mitchell, 2005:30). Geoffrey Batchen speaks in an even more corporeal way

[24] There is much literature on this subject - for example, Bazin (1960) Sontag (1982), Maynard (1997), Rose (2010).

by arguing that the camera is touched by the world, and that due to the indexical connection between the object and the camera, ‘it is as if those objects reached out and impressed themselves on the surface of a photograph, leaving their visual imprint, as faithful to the contour of the original object as a death mask is to the deceased’ (Batchen, 2004:31).

Yet, it is worth noting that this physical closeness, or what Janne Seppänen (2017:121) refers to as the ‘proximity effect’, is really only evoked when there is an emotional connection between viewer and image, for example in family photographs, portraits or documentary photographs, rather than commercial advertising, still life or fashion photography. I would argue that in this respect, some of my images of wigs elicit a more complicated emotional response because of the way that the wig’s poses evoke a kind of anthropomorphic closeness, in spite of the fact they are clearly objects.

Geoffrey Batchen is not the only writer to draw a connection between the photograph and a death mask, or loss. Roland Barthes famously identified the photograph’s indexical connection to something absent; he writes that the photograph’s reality is that of ‘having-been-there’ (Barthes, 1977:44). And he further emphasised the photograph’s link to memory, mortality and loss in ‘Camera Lucida’ (1980). Kaja Silverman reminds us that many discussions around indexicality and the photograph focus on the past, ‘an analogue photograph is presumed to stand in for an *absent* referent – one that is no longer there’ (Sliverman, 2015:2).

What interests me about the camera’s indexical relationship with the subject is not the power of the photograph to summon up the memory or presence of someone or something from the *past*, but the material implications of, to repeat Batchen’s words again, the way the subject ‘*reache[s] out and impresse[s] themselves* on the surface of a photograph’ (my italics) (2004:31). This could be interpreted as a form of agency on behalf of the subject (human and non-human) *and* the material surface of the photograph. Kaja Silverman (2015:15) argues that early adopters of photography viewed the photograph, its surface, and the photographer as something (or

someone) that *received* images; the idea of a photograph being "taken" (putting human agency at the centre of the process) came later (2015: 25). Photographic processes were framed as the world 'coming forward' or 'presencing, through self-presentation' (2015:47).

These ideas not only reposition the focus of indexicality from absence or record (the past) to a more active, on-going relationship between camera, subject and photograph[25]. They also can be framed in New Materialist terms: the notion of the indexical trace could be categorised as a network or set of relational conditions that demonstrate porosity or agency. There are also some similarities here with Jane Bennett's 'thing-power', in the way that the subject 'calls out' and to an already *active* photographic surface. Janne Seppänen argues that the indexical trace *is material* (in both analogue and digital contexts) and as such it 'renders the photographic representation into the state of epistemological ambiguity' (2017:123). If we agree with the claim that the indexical trace is material, then, as Seppänen, after Göran Sonesson (2001) argues, 'the photograph is not only an indexicality of the objects, or even the photons, but also of the properties of the film, of the lenses, of the photographic device generally, of the space covered by the photons, and so on' (2017:118). This shifts the photograph (and the processes that contribute to its becoming) from something stable and *fixed* (to use photographic terminology) to something very much unstable, and fluid. This echoes Law and Mol's (2002:10) notion of complexity, discussed in the introduction to this thesis, in the sense that photography can be seen has having several layers that interfere or interact with one another. Of course, this does not negate the way that the photograph, in social contexts, is associated with absence and memory, it does present other ways of working with the photograph and

[25] Janne Seppänen draws on quantum electrodynamics to argue that the digital process of photography is as material as an analogue one, 'photochemical and digital photography differ in terms of technological mediation, material qualities and end product. […] in both cases the trace is transformed by storing it in solid material form. Although the digital code is not itself constituted as firm matter, it is inscribed into the solid substances of the camera's memory, whose materiality is formed by changes in the electromagnetic radiation absorbed by the image sensor' (2017: 116-117).

photographic processes, viewing both as relational surfaces that have an active presence in the now.

Having considered one way that the indexical trace can subvert the perceived representational qualities of the photograph, I now move on to discuss another. Kaja Silverman's research has opened up an alternative way of thinking about the photograph. By using the term analogy instead of representation she unpicks several assumptions about what photography is, and how images are constituted (2015:12). I am particularly interested in how her ideas re-position the role of the photographer as less central to the process, and how the stability of the image is challenged through the idea of *resemblance* rather than sameness in the pictorial depiction of the subject. Just as the wig disrupts the seamless surface of the body (as I discuss in Chapter One) by drawing attention to the way that the body's edges are permeable, Silverman prises open a gap between representation and referent to disrupt the commonly held view that the camera makes a copy of the subject.

Silverman, as I have noted above, uses the term analogy to unfix the idea that the indexical connection between subject and image results in sameness: 'Every analogy contains both similarity and difference. Similarity is the connector, what holds two things together, and difference is what prevents them from being collapsed into one' (Silverman, 2015:11). The photographic image resembles the subject depicted, but it is different, and this is an important point because as I have outlined in Chapter One, and above, representation is so often perceived as the *same as* rather than *similar to*.

To photograph a wig, if thinking in purely representational terms, suggests that a copy of it is produced. This indicates that there is an *original* version of the wig, and that the photographic representation of the wig is less real. If we accept that the indexical trace has a material agency, then the photographs that I make of wigs could be considered to be embodied with physical traces of the wig (along with everything else present – both visible and invisible – at

the time the photographs were taken). Combining this way of thinking about my photographs with Silverman's 'analogy' approach means I produce a photographic object that resembles a wig, (and that is also embodied with wigness). In fact, I deploy the camera's ability to produce an indexical trace in order to transform the idea of the wig into a different form; I make a different object altogether. I see this as a shape-shifting process, the wig changes its physical, material form (it is now made of pixels and paper), whilst still embodying its wigness: I make a wig-photo chimera. One advantage of deploying aspects of the camera's ability to make likenesses is that even though we cannot touch the glossy material surfaces of the wig directly, we can imagine them through our perceptions of the photograph and its glossy surface.

3.1.1 Framing the Wig

The decisions relating to the staging and framing of the wig effect how it translates from three-dimensional object to flat surface. I have used a “straight” photographic style, meaning the camera is directly parallel to the object, and any distortion from the camera’s optics (or lighting) or the photographer’s “artistic” intentionality is minimised. This photographic approach is similar to the way we see, and I have chosen it to maximise the indexical connection with the material wig; the trace of the wig becomes coded into the digital file when the shutter is released.

Fig. 21, Sarah Eyre, ‘work in progress’, (2019), laser print on paper, 29 x 21cm

The resulting images [fig. 21] look like a straightforward copy or documentary record of the wig, however, this apparently naturalistic approach belies a more complex thought process regarding the way that the wig is framed within the photographic space.

By photographing the wig within an infinity cove[26] I have created a frame around it, by which I mean I have created a photographic space for the wig by separating it from everything outside of the frame, and by extension, everything outside of the studio. The gesture is as if I had used photography to cut the wig out and isolate it from the day-to-day flow of time and space. Ernst van Alphen (2018:14) comments that this compositional technique limits the three-dimensionality of the object depicted, as it acts as a ‘second frame within the frame of photography’, closing off the ‘suggestion that space extends beyond the frame’.

The wig is not just isolated spatially, it is also positioned outside of the temporal flow; there is nothing in the image to show it as a moment captured from time passing. This is important because the notion of the wig being suspended or enclosed within a controlled photographic space, as opposed to a temporal and three-dimensional space, reinforces the impression that the photographic frame forms a kind of container, or boundary, around the wig. I am arguing that the particular compositional style I have used brings the wig and the photograph together and forms an image that is solid, stand-alone, opaque. Due to the soft shadows cast by the wig, it is a space that does hint at depth.

The way that the wigs are posed within the photographic studio also reinforces a sense of separation. They are positioned (as is the camera, and

[26] A horizon-less ‘curved’ set up mostly used in commercial photography to isolate the subject, there is no sense of beyond.

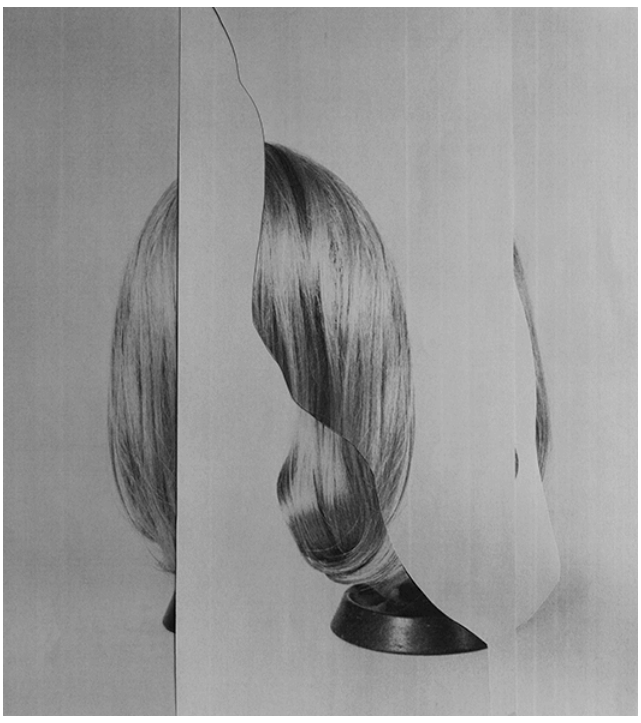
photographer) so that the viewer is looking directly at them. Van Alphen (2018:78) claims that this kind of positioning is akin to 'staging', as if the things depicted were on a proscenium stage, which also reinforces the constructed nature of the image. It is not a window or slice of world, it is a box, with defined edges. This is a space to construct photographs that we associate with commercial still life, fashion and formal portrait photography and I have used it to suggest that in this environment it is the wig that is centre stage.

The wigs are placed upright, suggesting a gaze that has turned away from the camera. This was done to subtly shift their human/object relational conditions: when they are positioned like this their relationship with us is a little more ambiguous. If I had positioned them facing the camera then I believe that the viewer could respond to them differently. Firstly, revealing the face shaped hole that is the front of the wig would make it too easy for the viewer to anthropomorphise or embody the wig. Secondly, (as outlined in Chapter Two) the wig's 'affordances' would be clear, and they would be read as something that one just wears on the head, rather than an object that exists independently of the human body. Positioning the wigs in this way suggests that they are moving into the realm of the thing, whilst maintaining their wigness. It is a part-thingyfying method. The wigs are turned away from embodiment towards a more mysterious space. They become more uncanny when they are poised between object and thing, inert and alive; their own category boundaries become confusing.

The resulting images were printed on a variety of laser printers[27]. What I like about laser printers is that unlike more sophisticated photographic printing methods, they leave a trace. This might be lines, colour misalignments or

[27] Laser printing is a kind of digital / analogue hybrid like photocopying, and the prints are made from ink fused on to the surface of the paper. Laser printing has derived from Xerography, where the image has been exposed to light sensitive paper in a drum (a kind of analogue process). Contemporary laser printing still uses analogue stages - exposing, developing - but transferring instead of fixing.

digital noise, it varies from printer to printer. These traces act as a kind of material surface that subtly disrupts the image depicted, in fact, it becomes part of the pictorial image and a material layer in its own right.



Figs 22 & 23, Sarah Eyre, from the series ‘Copy/Cut/Paste’, (2019)

3.2 Cut

There is a three-fold rationale for cutting and layering in my practice. Firstly, it is a way of opening up the photograph – and the wig through its depiction in the photograph – both materially and conceptually, in order to disrupt the representational qualities of the photograph and to re-figure its boundaries and edges. Secondly, I can change the nature of the photographic space (depicted and material) by cutting into and through the print in order to suggest that there are layers or spaces beneath or between the photographic surface(s). Both of these devices can imply the suggestion of depth to the photograph (and by association, the wig). Finally, it is a way that I can draw attention to the surface and materiality of the photograph, to thingyfy the photograph; to make the surface palpable by making it strange, as a way of shifting its relational conditions, in order to discover something unexpected from both wigs and photographs.

The holes I cut into the photograph are as integral to the meaning of the work as the positioning of the wigs. Slicing into and through my photographic prints has invigorated photography for me because I have realised that the cut, often considered a damaging or subtractive gesture, can be used to *add* something, in my case, the suggestion of depth or interiority (literally and conceptually) to an image. I am referring here to an image in both senses: the subject depicted pictorially, and the wig-photo *thing*. Cutting and layering methods like the ones I employ create chimeric surfaces; the re-shaping of different parts and edges to create new forms.

Cutting up and cutting out are different actions, and have different connotations. Cutting out, argues Caroline Case, 'has smoother emotions and sensations to it. Cutting round brings with it the sense of care and not wanting to damage' (Case, 2006:42). In my work, I bring together a series of cuts in order to re-shape edges, to change rather than destroy. I cut out to reveal, but to also conceal, like a hairdresser cuts and layers to re-shape one's hair (or wig), in order to refresh or transform, but perhaps also to cover and hide.

A cut and a hole create a tension that enlivens the photograph. A hole or a gap can make the photograph and subject more visible. David Campany, discussing the work of John Stezaker, argues that a cut is ‘a peculiar kind of intervention, there and not there.’ He continues, ‘It can be very apparent or hide itself seamlessly,’ for example, the unseen cuts in advertising/fashion images, and in contrast, the way that ‘the avant-gardes have always tended to keep the cut active, palpable, thinkable’ (Campany, 2017:22).

It is the idea of keeping the cut active that interests me. In my practice, a cut is not a means to an end like it is in some collage or montage work, nor is it a kind of stain or connotation of damage to the image. I believe that by drawing attention to the surface of the photograph by cutting through it is a way of making the photograph “slip”; this slippage is more clearly reinforced once the cut image is re-photographed. It is the slippage at the surface that opens up the notion that the photograph suggests or alludes to depth. The interruption of the surface is transferred to the pictorial image of the wig, causing a slippage in its coherent surfaces and implying that the wig too is a complex object with unexpected depths. The space that the cut opens up adds the suggestion of complexity and depth to the subject of the image and the photographic object itself. This effect is reinforced through re-photographing the resulting reliefs, and I expand further on this in Section 3.3.

In terms of influence on my practice, John Stezaker is one of the most significant “cutters” of photographs. He makes various interventions, often cutting into “found” imagery such as film stills, actor headshots and vintage postcards. In the series ‘Tabla Rasa’ and ‘Circles’ [fig.24] he neatly removes parts of single photographs to create disruptions and voids that subtly alter the narrative and subject of the original photographs.

Fig. 24, John Stezaker, ‘The Approach’, from the series ‘Circles X’, (2014), Collage

Writing about Stezaker’s ‘Circles’ series, Robert Leonard talks about the way that the circular voids Stezaker cuts out of photographs (found film stills) have shifted the point of interest; the holes become our centre of interest, ‘as image becomes frame and off-screen space moves center stage. What remains of the image now points to the hole, offering clues to what may have disappeared behind the event horizon’ (Leonard, 2017:12). He comments that the viewer is now transfixed by the absence (in the midst of something), and that the hole suggests a question. It certainly makes me question what I am looking at, I want to see more and get into the image but I cannot because the hole does not really go anywhere, it is a dead end. Yet, the hole stirs me into thinking about this image as having an *inside*, it becomes more visceral; I do not need to see its inside to imagine this. The photograph is transformed into something more mysterious and layered, the photographic surface itself now has depth, or another side; one that we cannot see, a bit like a wig’s inside. It is the cut, and the resulting allusion to other spaces that does this. We cannot *see* anything else, but we can start to imagine something else, an uncanny space where one should not really exist.

My interest in Stezaker's work is in the way that his interventions create new images; they are not just fragments of images, but new images with different meanings and a new visual charge. Cutting into a photograph, as I have already discussed, can be perceived as a destructive act, although I would argue that this is not something that applies to my practice because I produce my own images in order to cut them up. However, in photographic terms, this might still be considered a subversive act as I create photographs for the *sole purpose* of cutting them up, which might appear perverse. In Stezaker's hands, destruction becomes a creative act; the photographs are not *reduced* by the cut, they are made *more* complex. It is this discovery that has driven my own interest in the cut, particularly photographs of wigs, because I aim to explore the way that cutting into photographs opens up the suggestion of complexity – not just of the photograph and the photograph's agency on the viewer – but also of the wig itself. Of course, cutting is an act that is also associated with hair (and occasionally wigs). Hair is not cut just because it grows, it is also cut in order to re-style it, or re-shape it.

Fig. 25, Aliki Braine, ‘Shot #1’ (2008), Black and white photograph with hole punched negative

Aliki Braine [fig. 25] punctures and folds her photographs in order to draw attention to the photograph’s material properties. Her gestures obscure and erase parts of the image so we are constantly reminded that we are looking at a photograph, an object *and* a representation. Felicity Cole has argued that in obscuring parts of her image, Braine creates space for the viewer to fill in the voids with their own images. ‘Braine’s abstractions force the viewer to conceptualise and imagine beyond the photographic evidence presented in the print’ (Cole, 2013:np), opening up the possibility of what Cole calls an ‘imaginative discourse’ with her images. In Braine’s folded photographs the image depicted is obscured, we cannot see it but know it is there under the surface.

The cut is also a strategy I use to manipulate different kinds of space *within* the photographic space. Stezaker[28] and Braine’s interventions, in my opinion, sit on the *surface* of their images. This is because neither one exhibits *re-photographed* images, so our attention is drawn to the material edges of their cuts and folds, which remind us that we are looking at images *and* objects. This means that the space alluded to in their work is an actual physical space made by cutting through the photographic object. The void left by their cuts is perceived as part of the image, but, at the same time it is clear that the cut or void is *separate* to the image. Stezaker and Braine’s manipulations are not inside the photographic space in the way that my cuts are, they sit on top of the photograph. Because we can clearly see the cut edges, their photographs imply that there is an also an underside, but, in my opinion, this is the underside of the photographic object, rather than the pictorial image. This is significantly different to the implications of my use of the cut. In my practice, it is the manipulations *within* the pictorial image that when *combined*

[28] I am referring here to the bodies of work such as ‘Circle’ and ‘Tabla Rasa’ where Stezaker cuts voids or holes into photographs.

with the material surface of the photograph, open up the possibility that the photograph, just like the wig, could indicate a depth that is beyond the surface of the photograph. This suggestion of an interior can only be thought about when both subject and photograph are tightly entwined.

3.2.1 Space within the Photograph

John Stezaker's 'Mask' series (c.1982-2018), and to a lesser extent his 'Pair' series (c.1982-2007) complicate the argument I have outlined above. Despite the material edge of the postcards and photographs being clearly visible, the power of his combinations collapses the boundaries between the two separate photographs. The series comprises of postcards of geological features and landscapes layered over the top of actor publicity shots, and it is the nature of the images on top – the depiction of enclosures and spaces – that evokes the sensation of delving deep into the photograph below.

Fig. 26, John Stezaker, Mask CCV, (2016), Collage

The works are uncanny and disturbing, particularly because the “host” image is a face. The illusion of a depth beyond the surface of the photographs is clear. Stezaker says of his layering process:

> Even though they are literally on top, I don’t think of the postcards as being in front. I feel they are excavating a space behind. Not only behind spatially, but behind temporally. Placing the postcards onto the film stills suggests a drift backwards in both space and time (Stezaker interviewed by Leonard, 2019:np).

The collages evoke an other-worldliness, they are “out of time” in the way that they are embedded with the patina of the past (through the strange colouration of old printing processes). The spaces beyond the surface of the collage are plausible in a dream logic kind of way.

Michael Bracewell comments that Stezaker uses ‘contours as delineators of portals [as] the entries into the interior space and “consciousness” of an image’ (2010:15). For me, this relates to the kind of ‘behind’ space the images evoke: a space of the mind, not a curiosity about the space behind the photographic object. The imagery used evokes a sense of space, or depth located in the images themselves. As the material is from the past, the space they evoke is not physical or earthly, but feels more like a hazy memory – or perhaps a dream. Despite the similarities between my practice and Stezaker’s, in terms of technique and motif (the uncanny, the shape of the head), in my work I aim to create the illusion of spaces and depths that are more materially present. *Material* in the sense that they belong to the photograph as well as the image, and *present* as if the photograph is embodied with the presence of the here and now.

Lucas Blalock is a photographer whose work comes closest to my ideas about the photograph and space. In a similar way to my more directly physical gestures of cutting and layering, he uses tools in Photoshop to rub out, clone, cut, copy and paste in order to re-shape the space within photographic image [figs 27 & 28].

Fig. 27, Lucas Blalock, ‘Rocking Chair’, (2012), C-Print, 53 by 42 inches

Blalock investigates the ‘behind-the-picture-plane space of photography’ (Blalock interviewed in Blalock and Schultz, 2018:np). What interests me about Blalock’s work is the way that photographic space is represented in his images, particularly in the way he suggests the illusion of depth within the photograph itself, not just in the flattened depicted space. He comments that ‘behind the surface of the picture there are two realities sharing this space—the worldly space that has always been the space of the photograph and this very plastic virtual space’ (Blalock interviewed in Blalock and Dafoe 2016:np). The virtual space is an impossible space in a physical sense because it is beyond the pictorial space, but in Blalock’s images this space seems plausible. He disrupts the conventional depicted space of the

photograph in ways that are clearly non-photographic (see figs 27 & 28 for an example of the way that he combines photographic and non-photographic effects made by different Photoshop tools), but still manage to allude to a kind of curious non-space, making the images dynamic.

Blalock argues, ‘As things – as objects – photographs are pretty unsatisfying. I mean, they have no real volume, no real surface but this has been a kind of opportunity to draw attention to this lack and replace it with surrogate surfaces and volumes in the photographic subjects themselves’ (Blalock interviewed in Blalock and Schultz, 2018:np). The fact that our attention is drawn to the photograph’s lack makes his images even more interesting in my mind. It makes them uncanny; we know these spaces should not be there, yet we are convinced by them. The photograph in Blalock’s work (like the photograph and the wig in my work) has been made strange; the surface has slipped a little and become something that is capable of concealing an unexpected interior. This is the difference between Blalock’s images and Stezaker’s ‘Mask’ series: with Blalock’s work the sense of the uncanny comes from the anxiety caused by the visual disruption of the photograph’s surface; the photograph – and to some extent the image depicted – is doing something strange. Whereas in Stezaker’s ‘Mask’ series, I forget I that am looking at a photographic object, it is solely the images that evoke the sense of uncanny depth. With Stezaker’s work I do not feel like I have caught a glimpse of an alien or uncomfortable kind of photographic space (as evoked by Blalock’s), because I feel I am travelling into the distant time and space that the images convey.

There are different kinds of space being manipulated in Blalock’s work, both within the space of the subject depicted (see fig. 28), and what appears to be the surface of the image (see fig. 27). In ‘The Seer’ [fig. 28] the graphic (non-photographic) manipulations complicate this even further. The result is that the image oscillates between being a manipulation of the subject and a manipulation of the image, because some manipulations appear within the photographic space, whilst others reside on the surface of the image. He

sometimes adds shadow which complicates the representation of space even further.

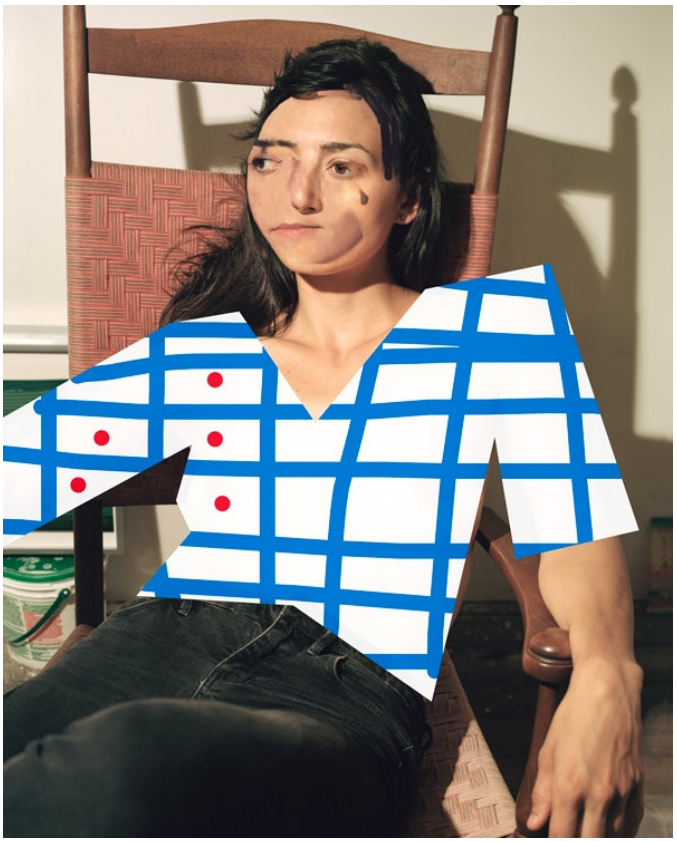


Fig. 28 Lucas Blalock (2017) ‘The Seer’, C-Print, 98 x 78.5 cm

Blalock has been influenced by Pepe Karmel’s writings on the evolution of Cubism. On reading Karmel’s essay ‘Spaces’ (2003), I was also struck by the different techniques used by painters to represent pictorial depth. In short, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque utilised a Renaissance technique by starting with a background and layering imagery; building depth from the bottom up, as opposed to painting a foreground surface and then moving towards depth. The implications of this, according to Karmel (2003:25), are that with the former method, elements of the picture push forward from the surface towards the viewer, which is the opposite effect to later painting methods, where depth is suggested by the image opening inwards, like a window opening up to a scene. So, in terms of the photographic image, the convention is that the surface opens up like a “window on the world”, very rarely does the photographic surface push towards the viewer’s space. This text has given me a better understanding of what Blalock is attempting to do

in his photographs and it is clear that he is using both methods described above. His manipulations on top of his images appear as though they are pushing towards the viewer, and his manipulations within the photographic space open up the photograph to suggest an interior depth, implying that the photograph is more than just the flat surface we see.

Blalock's work and Karmel's text have been useful in helping me establish a framework for developing a method of manipulating the pictorial space of my photographs: the depicted subject, *and* the surface of the photograph. What makes my intentions different to Blalock's is that he does not appear concerned with the illusion of space within specific subjects depicted. His subject is the nature of space within photography itself, and he has applied his methods to images of people, chairs, fruit and shoes, pretty much anything. However, my methods are very much entangled with my subject. I propose that the wig, *and* the photograph have an interior and an exterior in the same image.

The methods of building images that I deploy use both of the techniques mentioned above. Sometimes I start from a base, or a background image, and build a relief by adding layers of cut photo fragments, leaving gaps between them. Alternatively, I start with a top picture, and cut through it, then layer other prints and holes underneath. The former approach is most apparent in later work from the 'Copy / Cut / Paste' where I use the Photoshop checkerboard, which is a graphic representation of both the "back" of Photoshop and infinite space (fig. 29). The checkerboard is a digital surface, it signifies a hole, or transparent part of an image in Photoshop (but has to be represented graphically to differentiate it from white space). Interestingly, it disappears when an image is saved. I can only reproduce it by taking a screen grab from Photoshop and printing that; transforming a digital space analogue for it to remain permanently visible. My use of this surface in my work is another way I hint at the unstable and paradoxical nature of the photograph.

Figure 29 is an example of an image that is built from the background forward. I often use both methods in the same image, by overlapping and weaving images in and out of the cut-out gaps so as to suggest a receding depth (and interiority) *and* an active surface that pushes out into the viewer's space (making reference to the intertwining of virtual and real spaces in constructing a photograph). These strategies are important because they give the photographs a vitality, through the push and pull between different kinds of spaces *within* the photograph, *and* the space between the viewer and photograph. It is this uncanny animated-ness that reinforces the illusion that the photograph, the photographic object and the photographic surface, reveal and conceal different kinds of spaces. And also, that the wig reveals and conceals a number of different spaces both within and beyond *its* surface.

Fig. 29: Sarah Eyre, from the series ‘Copy/ Cut / Paste’, (2019)

3.2.2 Cut Out

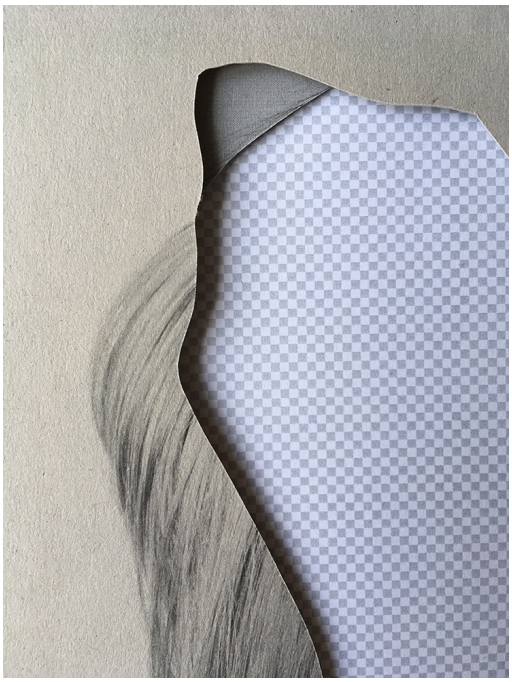
The shape of the cuts and spaces that I cut out of the prints are essential in giving a coherence to the final images and are integral in reinforcing the implied interiority, particularly in terms of the illusion of interior spaces of the wig. The shape of the cut holes also alludes to the corporeal. This is a way of reintroducing the relationship with the body back to the wig and the photograph, but in this case suggesting that the photograph is a non-human body that has a relationship with us. The body is implied through partial outlines, and sometimes through the associations with layers of skin.

Interiority carries with associations of exteriority: the interior is contained by an exterior; the insides of the wig are contained by the holes cut out. Many of the holes and gaps I cut out of the prints create an edge, and when layered with other images form a kind of container, this can be seen in the example above (fig. 29). These edges allude to the edge of the wig, and provide what I think of as a type of skin, because of the way they enclose and unify the other manipulations. The edges are surrounded by another edge, that of the flat background, again reinforcing the idea of edges and containers, or outsides and insides in the images. There are lots of other elements of the image that suggest interior and exterior too; the shadows and the planes of hair connoting inside spaces and outside spaces.

I have also used other shaped “holes”. I made stencils from voids left in magazine pages after cutting out various bits of the female body; the resulting spaces or holes created new edges, and new intentions, and was another way of subtly alluding to the body, albeit in an abstracted form (see fig. 34). This particular method was a turning point in my research because it opened up new ways of cutting and layering photographs. Additionally, it meant that I could introduce images of the body in a removed yet present way, and it is another way of using the cut – conventionally seen as a removal of something – to add something to the image.

In my previous project ‘Penetralia’ I dealt more explicitly with the notion of interiority in wigs. In ‘Penetralia’, the wig’s suggested “interiors” took a fleshy form (as discussed in Chapter Two), which was appropriate to the aim of that project, as the wigs themselves took on quite corporeal qualities. ‘Penetralia’ featured circular holes only, suggesting the penetration of a surface, the edges between the outer wig and inner layers were hard edges. In ‘Copy / Cut / Paste’ I was more interested in bringing a sense of dynamism to the surface of the wig and the photograph. I only want to hint at what the surface might slip and reveal, not actually show it. The surfaces do not open as such, as they did in ‘Penetralia’, but slip across each other.

I believe that there is something *more* visceral (something of flesh under the skin) about the work that became the ‘Copy / Cut / Paste’ series. In order to suggest layers and hint at depth to both the wig depicted in the photograph, and the photograph itself I added layers and spaces by making the photographic print into a three-dimensional object: a shallow relief. At this stage the photograph is in an in-between state, a thing that sits in-between a sculpture and a photograph, and, in-between two dimensionality and three dimensionality. By expanding the photograph in this way I have in a sense given it a body (I have also returned the wig to its three-dimensional form). The photograph has, in a sense, become engorged.



Figs 30 & 31, Sarah Eyre, studio assemblage and detail, (2019)

Tamara Trodd's (2009) essay on Thomas Demand's[29] work has been useful in terms of considering ways in which associations of the body, without

[29] Thomas Demand is a photographer who makes paper models based on news photographs of crime scenes or significant and traumatic events. He re-creates these images by using plain coloured sheets

actually depicting it, can be conveyed through different photographic methods. It has to be noted that Trodd presents a very unconventional reading of Demand's work, and it is not his work itself that interests me, it is the way Trodd has analysed it using the metaphor of ingestion that I have found informative.

Trodd comments that despite the lack of bodies within Demand's work, his photographs and their display 'provoke strong bodily reactions from the viewer: of claustrophobia, of airlessness, and of an inward shudder or quiver, like nausea, as though the pictures led inwards into our own bodies' (Trodd, 2009:963). This could be considered an effect and affect of Demand's work and this, she argues, is triggered by the combined references, motifs and connotations of interiority in Demand's photographic process. Trodd lists the different aspects of 'interiority' in Demand's work, but most interesting in terms of my methods is her positioning of Demand's practice as one 'in which the sculptural object is created by being externalized from the inside of a photograph, and then is re-digested, or made to disappear again, repeatedly, systematically, 'inside' the image' (Trodd, 2009:964).

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of paper, he photographs these installations - or sculptures, and then destroys them. The work is the photographs, and these are exhibited at different scales - often life size. (see Fig. 32)

Fig. 32: Thomas Demand, Detail V11, (1997) C-Print, 81 x 83 cm

In a later part of the same paragraph she refers to the '*body* of photography' (my italics), which has a clear corporeal association. In terms of my practice, and particularly the images I have made in the 'Copy / Cut / Paste' series, there is clearly a sense that each stage of my process absorbs or ingests the next; the wig is ingested by the first photographic stage and the framing device I have used reinforces the idea that the wig is suspended in a kind of vessel which could be perceived as bodily. In my next stage, the prints (spat out/regurgitated?) of the wig are cut open, fragmented, re-configured, built into a part sculpture; a three-dimensional relief (which re-fleshes out the wig but in a different material form), it is then re-absorbed or ingested into the body of my photography when it is re-photographed. To continue with the digestion analogy, there is a further regurgitation and ingestion as the images are again printed and encapsulated inside frames within a gallery, and viewed as a *body* of work.

This section has outlined the different ways in which cutting, layering and building has expanded the photograph. Space has been introduced in and

between the photograph. The fixed photographic surface has been unpicked. The next section will examine how these are brought back together by re-photographing the shallow relief.

3.3 Paste

The final stage of re-shaping the photographic process is to turn my layered three-dimensional reliefs back into photographs. Actually, this is misleading, they have always been photographs: this next stage, which uses the camera more directly, collapses the layers together. In a sense, this is a form of “fixing”, to use a photographic analogy. The term “paste” is also relevant as it conjures up the digital gesture of copying, cutting and pasting elements of imagery (or text) that are important in building or making an image. Of course, it could also refer to the action of “pasting” in collage or montage. If I return to the multi-layered laminate that I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, then sealed, fused or laminated are similarly appropriate terms.

The effect of re-photographing the work should result in a smooth and coherent surface, yet, it actually creates more visual uncertainty as depth and surface are not clearly distinct. The photograph appears as though it has one visible surface, unlike painting, which can have several layers, despite this, I do not think it is that simple. Photography might only have one visible surface, but, as I demonstrate with this series of images, the photographic surface can be complex – as complex as any painting. It is smooth and flat, but it can still conceal, it can still have pictorial depth, and it can disorientate.

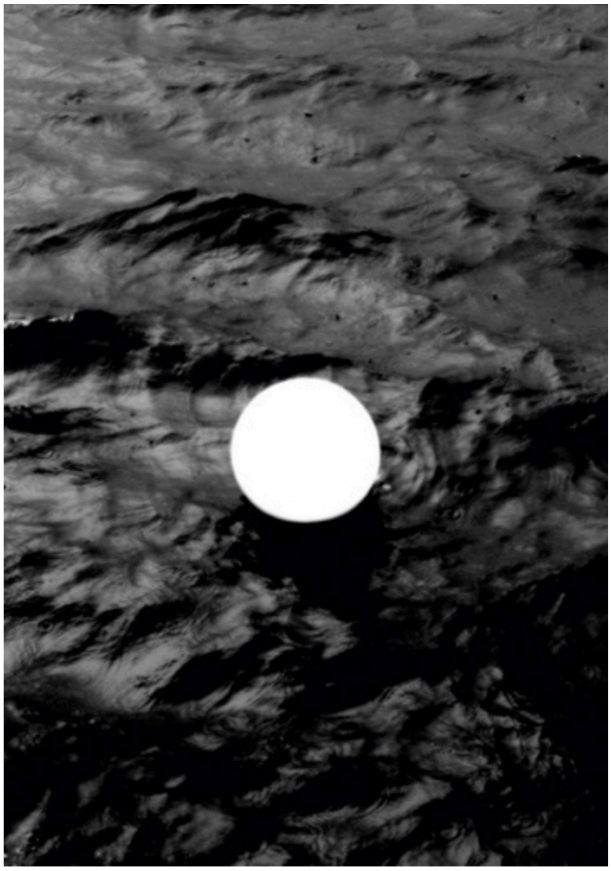

Fig. 33: Bianca Brunner, Fender, (2010), silver gelatin print 90 x 62.5 cm

Bianca Brunner's photographic images confuse the eye: they prompt us to question what we are looking at. For example, in the image 'Fender' [fig. 33], I question whether I am looking at a gap in the image, in the photograph or a white globe. Are we dealing with flatness or with something that has volume and depth, 'that the eye must attempt to explore and penetrate' (Dillon, 2010:46). Technically there is nothing concealed in this image, but its unusual construction lends the illusion that we are dealing with either an image or an object that has volume and depth, because the edges that can help orientate the eye and the brain slip out from one's grasp.

Similarly in my images, that which was a hole, fold, and shadow are all flattened, merged and transformed into a pictorial element within the image. This creates a different kind of illusory photographic space which allows for new relationships between different elements of the image to form. Photography is the only medium that generates the effect of collapsing seemingly real space and object so clearly. The pictorial effect of this

collapsing and encapsulating prompted me to experiment with double sided images, so when cut and folded the reverse became part of the image. New relationships between the front and back of an image were formed when the camera collapsed them all together (fig 34). This also proved to be an effective method of introducing a sense of interiority to the image. Returning to Lucas Blalock's methods; it is a way of manipulating the flat, photographic space to suggest a photograph (and a wig) has layers and potential depths. Just because a photograph is flat does not mean it is always read by the viewer as flat. This point can be illustrated by figure 34 below.

Fig. 34: Sarah Eyre, from the series ‘Copy/ Cut / Paste’, (2019) laser print

An interesting paradox is revealed in that by returning the work from its three-dimensional relief form to a flat photograph my ideas about photographic space become visually tangible. For example, to make visible the notion that wigs and photographs could be capable of hiding layers and depths under their surfaces, they need to be dematerialised by this flattening (photographic) process. This creates a tension in the images which could be perceived as disturbing and uncanny.

This final flattening stage is important because it is the point where my ideas about slippages at the surface of the photograph and wig, the perception of depth, concealment and the theoretical and practical porosity of materials all converge. The traces of the spaces and shadows also merge within the photograph. In the flattened photograph different kinds of spaces and states co-exist. New relationships between digital, analogue, hand-made, virtual, interior and exterior can be formed as the different materialities merge in this re-shaped relational surface.

This flattening stage does not imply a finality to the image as once the photographs are reprinted (copied) the whole process can be started again, in fact I have done this in the creation of many of the pieces of work in this series. The resulting photographs becoming more visually complex and disorientating as the images slip in and out of virtual and physical states. The final stage in my process is to make decisions about scale, print and framing. I had the opportunity to exhibit my work "in progress" in September 2019[30] and this enabled me to make some decisions about scale and presentation. For this exhibition I opted to print the photographs a little larger than the size of a human head. The reason for this is that I wanted there to be a kind of correspondence between the picture and the viewer, but with the viewer feeling slightly smaller; as a way of subtly unsettling the viewing process. Due to the requirements of the space, the photographs needed to be framed in a "house" style which meant that white borders and dark frames encapsulated the images. On reflection, I feel that the presence of the photographs themselves was compromised in this presentation.

At the time of writing I have only experimented with scale and presentation methods for the PhD exhibition; and, I have realised two things. The first is

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[30] Leeds Arts University, Curated Spaces: Blenheim Walk Boardroom, September - December 2019. A critical text on the work written by Dr Freya Gowrley (2019) accompanied the exhibition

that the images need to be larger, but only fractionally, so that the viewer has an unequal confrontation with the images. The second is that they should be unframed and printed without borders. I intend to hang them from an invisible baton fixed to the wall so that they protrude slightly, throwing a shadow onto the wall as a way of connecting back to the shallow reliefs they once were.

Fig. 35, Sarah Eyre, ‘Copy/ Cut/ Paste’ Installation Shot, Leeds Arts University, (2019)

Conclusion

I began this chapter by observing the similarities between the wig and the photograph: both are surfaces (or can be read as surfaces) capable of concealing layers and depths. The material photograph itself, because of its perceived indexical relationship with the subject, is present but not always visible to the viewer, and one of my aims for the body of work 'Copy / Cut / Paste' was to draw attention to the photograph, its surface and its edges. I wanted to do this in a way that did not lose sight of the subject of the photograph: the wig. Because I use photographs of wigs, these could be deemed as "just" representations of wigs, rendering the materiality of the wig absent. Considering Janne Seppänen's (2017:123) argument that the indexical trace is *material,* and present, and Kaja Silverman (2015:47) and Geoffrey Batchen's (2004:31) ideas about the porous surfaces in front of, within and behind the camera that reach out to touch and be touched, has provided a framework for devising methods that position my photographic techniques as somewhere between the representational and non-representational. What I mean more specifically is that I have deployed the instability of this in-between zone to thingyfy both the wig and the photograph; through visually collapsing them into each other. They have been made theoretically and visually porous, they now co-exist as part of each other.

The wig's and the photograph's surfaces have been made strange and thing-like through the copying, cutting, folding, layering and re-assembling methods I have devised. Analysing the different cutting and layering methods of John Stezaker and Lucas Blalock has enabled me to understand the distinctive implications of photographic space in their work. In particular, the different destabilising and uncanny effects (and affects) evoked by the suggestion of space and depths in the image space (Stezaker) and in the more unsettling photographic space that can be seen in Blalock's photographs. This has informed decisions about how I make the surfaces in my photographs palpable and active; they slip across each other to reveal

gaps that hint at both the wig and the photograph concealing something unsettling.

The fractured surfaces, the suggestion of depth and interiority make associations with the corporeal, the body, but not in its usual form. I have introduced elements of the body not in order to suggest human-centred relational conditions, but as a way of “fleshing out” the surface of both wig and photograph, to suggest they are vital, changeable, and becoming; qualities that we might associate with human agency.

Conclusion

When I think back to my first encounter with the wig, through locks of hair sprawled across Manchester pavements, I remember how visceral my reaction was. My initial relationship to the fallen hairpieces was as if they personified the kind of pathos or shame evoked by letting one's wig slip; of losing control and revealing the messy business of the body and its urges. I remember the anxiety of seeing a bit of something that belonged on the body lying in the street. I felt that it could almost be a part of myself, and it brought with it the sudden awareness of how easily my own body/self boundaries could become uncertain and blurred.

Throughout the duration of this research I have put my emotional reaction to wigs to one side. I have, in a metaphorical sense, taken off the wig in order to look at it in its disembodied state. I have changed my position, instead of considering how the wearing of them effects and affects the body, I have introduced a distance between the wig and the body in order to frame it in a different kind of space. The wigs in my initial encounter were not considered of value: they were discarded, abandoned, their transformative power on the wearer no longer needed. They had already moved into an in-between state and space. When removed from the body the wig became a more complex and mysterious object, an object with an independence all of its own.

I began this research by exploring the wig as a social object, and over the duration of this project it has transformed from a material object to an image, a representation, a dematerialised collection of porous matter, to something uncanny and corporeal; it has ended up still visible as a wig but one that represents the more complex relationships we have with objects. In many ways the wig at the centre of this research has become unwearable - it certainly appears that way in my photographs (see figs. 36 & 37). Perhaps more pertinent is the idea that the wig has *exceeded* its wearability. At each

stage of the practice it has become more complicated, as I have explored how its effects extend beyond the wearing body. Elizabeth B. Silva has written that complex and unsettling objects:

> Never work alone, yet they can produce intangible effects. This is the central character of unsettling objects. The materiality of objects produces immaterial effects and the immaterial effects are read back into the materiality of objects' (Silva, 2014:184).

I have shown this to be true of the wig, both theoretically and through my photographic methods which I have used to draw attention to the way that both wigs and photographs can exceed their boundaries.

As the research progressed my photographic methods also "took off". Faced with the limitations of the more conventional documentary photographic approach that I previously used, I developed a series of processes that both re-shaped the way I made photographs, and the way I made photographs look. The destabilising - or as I have termed it in the thesis, the "thingyfying" - of the photographic image reinforced the destabilising of the wig and both of these separate but interlinked investigations fully converged in the final body of work 'Copy / Cut / Paste'.

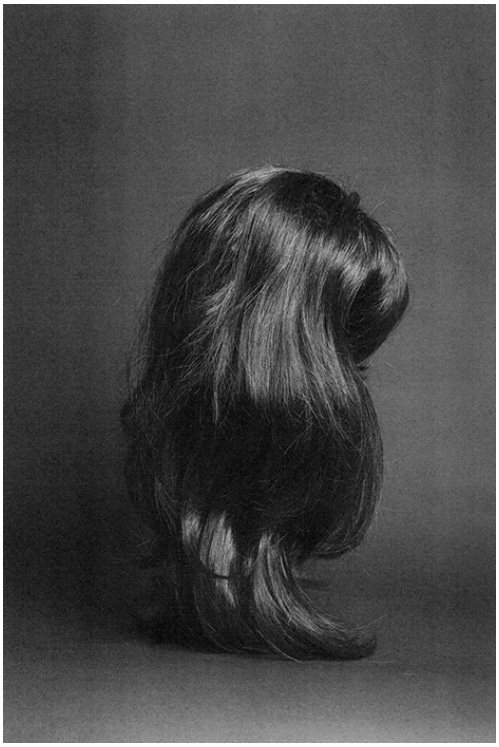


Fig. 36, Sarah Eyre, from ‘Wigs, (2012_ (2019)

Fig. 37, Sarah Eyre, from ‘Copy/ Cut/ Paste’

In Chapter One I outlined the ways in which the wig, so often only considered in relation to the transformation of the identity of the wearer, can be considered as an unsettling and complex object in its own right. I began to investigate how I might develop a photographic practice that made visible the many ways that the wig could be considered a contradictory and unruly object. The wig’s historic role of confirming the status of the wearer was undermined by the sources of the “hair” it was made from, as even in the sixteenth century, commentators drew attention to the way that the wig and its materials added extra layers that complicated the boundaries of the body. As the wig is made from something which grows from the body (although not in all cases as I have outlined), it has a problematic relationship with the body. It confuses the boundaries that separate the body and the self, and appearance and identity.

Wigs resemble part of the body, and as a disembodied double, they have an uncanny and unsettling effect when encountered off the body. It was this

aspect of the wig that informed my first set of photographs, and sowed the seeds for this research project. By carefully posing and lighting wigs in the studio I created images that were ambiguous in that they evoked a bodily gesture yet were clearly objects. The wigs in the photographs were just beginning to hint at their unsettling natures. I recognised that my use of the camera did not diminish the disembodied wig's unstable nature. In fact, it became clear that photography could be used to enhance the wig's "excessive" qualities and it became an aim to develop photographic methods that maintained some connection with the wig's materiality.

I have established that there are very few artists who have explored or used the wig for its wigness, and by that I mean make work *about* wigs, so I have had to situate my own methods within the context of a selection of other artists who, I argue, have drawn on elements of wigness in their practice in their use of hair. Emma Hart, Alice Maher and Margarita Gluzberg all refer to disembodied hair (that could be wigs), and through their use of materials and scale transform the ordinary into images that oscillate between uncanny, repulsive and beautiful. Sarah Lucas does not use or refer to hair, but the way she has subtly drawn out the suggestive qualities of women's tights shows how an object so apparently humble and mundane can be made to exceed the limitations of its day to day use. This led to my experimentation with the form of the wig itself by using a more sculptural approach to transforming the wig, resulting in some productive associations with the body in a more abject and corporeal sense, for example, the illusions to meat and innards in the series 'Furl' and 'Penetralia'.

It was Lorna Simpson's work with hair and wigs, and an essay by Brooke Belisle that really helped to shift my ideas, by identifying connections between wigs and photographs. In her writing on Simpson's installation 'Wigs', Belisle argued that hair and photographs both have an indexical relationship to a subject, but wigs in particular conceal a more complex relationship with the body, because wigs draw attention to the slippage in continuity between hair, one's appearance and the body. Based on the slippages identified by Belisle, as well as research into psychoanalytic theory

and the uncanny, I introduced the visual and conceptual metaphor of the wig slip into my practice. A wig that has slipped reveals what is concealed underneath, it also reveals itself to be a surface and a layer. It can reveal something that is meant to be kept hidden, but it can also expose just another layer. A wig slip can reveal a paradox, a wig folded back on itself, an exterior surface with its own interior. To think more broadly about how the metaphor of the wig slip could be applied I felt that I needed to shift the wig away from its human centred relationships in order to explore it within other frameworks, where I could more rigorously position it as an in-between object - or thing.

In Chapter Two I took a more divergent approach to the wig by exploring it and its various qualities through a New Materialist lens in order to conceptualise it as a *thing* with porous, and slippery boundaries. I found Jane Bennett's 2010 book 'Vibrant Matter', and its concept of 'porosity' and 'thing power' extremely useful. If an object's (a human or non-human object) edges are porous, then my work became an exploration into what extent the wig and the photographic surface can be regarded as permeable and re-shapeable and how they might be merged in an enlightening way. I came up with the term "thingyfy" as a practical and theoretical description of the way that my artistic methods repositioned the wig and the photographic surface as things that have the capability to slip and reveal themselves to be palpable and strange; simultaneously withholding and revealing something of their complexities.

The application of New Materialist methodologies revealed that the concepts and objects we understand as wigs and photographs are actually deeply layered, and are constituted through many active processes and networks which are often invisible. This frames them both as objects that are in fact fluid, malleable, unstable and relational. My photographic methods became more complex and process driven in order to reflect this conceptual shift from stable and fixed to ambiguous and in-between.

As already discussed, the body of work ‘Wigs’ necessitated a move from a documentary photography approach to the development of controllable, studio based constructed methods, in which the wig was framed in a performative and sculptural framework. This was manifest in the way that I molded, folded and posed the wigs for the camera. What was initially a way of capturing the performative nature of wigs became a way of depicting the performative nature of cut and folded photographs of wigs in the subsequent project ‘Furl’.

The paper sculptures I made for ‘Furl’, provided a significant turning point leading to changes in the methods I deployed. I wanted to return a three-dimensional element to the flat photographs of wigs, so I folded and cut holes into the prints, creating three-dimensional models which I then re-photographed. This resulted in the creation of an uncanny spatial dimension to the flat photographic surface, which I continued to develop in the next body of work ‘Copy / Cut / Paste’. A photographic image can depict three-dimensional space, and I attempted to suggest further spaces and surfaces that were not originally in the depicted image through my process of re-photographing; these manipulations collapsing and merging in the resulting image. As a consequence, I produced new and more unstable looking photographs of wigs containing confusing and unlikely spaces and edges where spaces and edges ought not to be.

In Chapter Three I refined the methodology to position both wigs and photographs as intertwined porous and relational surfaces. This meant making the wig in the photographs present, not as a representation of an absent wig, but an active agent within the photographic object. The way I did this was by re-framing the notion of the indexical trace. The perception that photographs (due to their indexical connection with the subject) reach out and “touch” the viewer is not new (as discussed in Chapter Three) and Kaja Silverman’s (2015) research into early photographic practices showed that the photographic surface and the world in front of the camera both reached out to touch the viewer. The discovery of Janne Seppänen’s New Materialist influenced argument that the indexical trace is *material* (2017: 123), was a

significant turning point because it implies that the trace of the subject is enmeshed within the ongoing processes of photography itself. I could therefore argue that there is the possibility of a slippage between the indexical trace of the subject and the image depicted within the photograph. This enabled me to conceptually transform the photographs to *things* that are materially relational, active and present, as opposed to a record of an absent moment and/or subject.

The conceptual shift in methodology necessitated a slight change in methods. The work of Lucas Blalock and John Stezaker was particularly useful to analyse because of the different methods they use to imply unexpected uncanny spaces and depths to their photographic works. Tamara Trodd's (2009) essay on Thomas Demand's work was also constructive, particularly the way that she identified the subtle allusions to ingestion and interiority in his work. Introducing the suggestion of interiority in places where one would not expect to see it (or imagine it), disrupts our expectations of photographic flatness (as it is photography's flatness that conceals just how unstable a photograph can be) and also evokes the uncanny, as I have identified in Blalock and Stezaker's work. The way that I made associations with the corporeal reinforces the uncanny in-betweenness of the photograph and the wig in my practice, but was also a way of making tangible the enmeshed material processes that make the photographic surface unpredictable and unstable.

New Materialism, to re-cap very simply, is concerned with flattening the hierarchies between matter, and decentering the human. In using analogies to the body in order to suggest that objects and surfaces can be vital non-human beings in their own right I am aware that I created a paradox. However, I argue that this might be the ideal way to suggest that they are *more than*, and that, especially when they converge as they do in my practice, they have a presence that can look back at us, enabling us to re-think the boundaries between us and them.

It is through the analogies with the corporeal in my work that I am re-situating wigs back into a social domain. Not the kind of social domain where we may consider our bodies, our environment, objects and surfaces as fixed, bounded and separate entities, but, as Ben Anderson observes (drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's writing), a social that is 'repopulated by objects, machines, and animals', that do not exist independently from each other, but rather all coexist on the same 'plane of immanence' (Anderson, 2010:14). By suggesting that wigs and photographs are porous and constituted from a combination of visible and invisible materialities, I have shown how the social is woven within them, and in turn, that they are not separate from us. By developing methods that blur the boundaries between the wig and the photograph's edges, between their surfaces and depths, and interiors and exteriors, I have created opportunities for new relationships to form and co-habit: the imaginary and the material, digital and analogue, viewer and art work, and of course, wig, photograph and body.

To conclude, I claim that the photographic methods developed here have revealed the wig to be an ontologically unstable and liminal thing capable of exceeding its porous borders. In turn, through the discovery of so many similarities and overlaps between wigs and photographs, I have exposed the photograph as also having the potential to be perceived as an *unfixed*, multi layered and relational object. In developing a methodology and new photographic methods specifically to reveal the complex layers of the wig, I situate my contribution to knowledge within art practices that explore the emerging debates around the potential agency of non-human objects.

My investigation also has a significance within the field of photographic practice because of the way that I have re-shaped the boundaries between materiality and surface to produce images that destabilise the look of the photograph, and challenging the idea of photographic flatness. Turning the surface of the photograph into something palpable, active and unstable. The perception of the subject depicted is also disrupted as it is so bound up with the methods of representation that I have used. The flattening effect of the camera, instead of smoothing everything over, actually makes the

destabilisation of the photographic space more obvious, because of the difficulty in separating deep space, surface, and shadow, and the edges that separate wig and photographic materiality.

Photography is so much more than the visual image depicted and my research has drawn on non-representational photographic practices in order to re-shape the notion of the indexical trace. The suggestion of visual porosity and material uncertainty that I allude to in my work encourages us to reconsider how we respond to a photograph. Through the application of non-representational ideas about the materialisation of the trace as one of *many* active and relational photographic layers and processes that slip across each other, I have shifted my photographs from records of absent wigs to present and unstable objects. In doing so, the reality effect of the photograph is spread across the practices that constitute a photograph rather than just the image depicted. Margaret Olin re-positions photography as a 'gestural practice', she comments that the photographic gesture is 'not usually meant to be seen', they 'are not the subject of the photograph' (Olin, 2012:13), but, in my practice they are. My photographic gestures *are* registered on the surface and this reminds us that photographic practices do more than represent the world, 'Gestures turn photographs into presences that populate the world like people' (Olin, 2012:14).

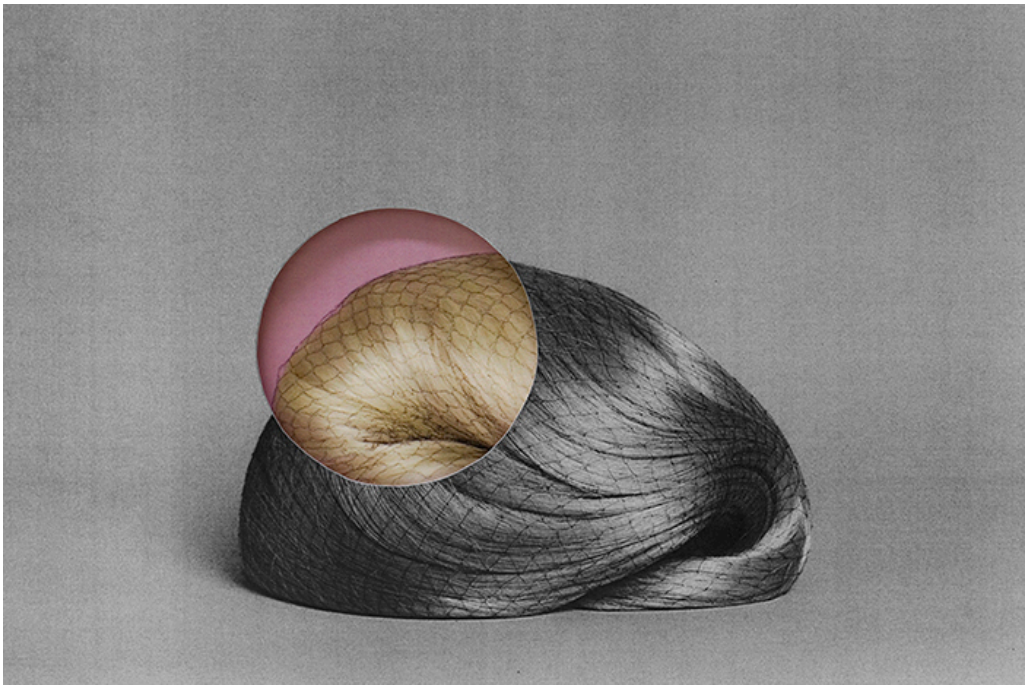
This investigation has transformed my practice and I have changed the way that I think about the photograph. My stretching of photographic processes to include cutting, layering, folding and re-photographing has resulted in images that blur the edges between image and surface and re-shape the photograph as something *made*, not taken. Processes I deployed have also destabilised the way that we perceive the photograph by the introduction of edges, holes, gaps, folds, and spaces - creating unfixed and vulnerable surfaces that are prone to slippage. This has implications for the way that we respond to photographs and the images they depict, and offers further potential in terms of my practice in continuing the project of re-shaping the way that photographs are experienced. The next stage would be to explore the effect of moving beyond the confines of the photographic frame and print and

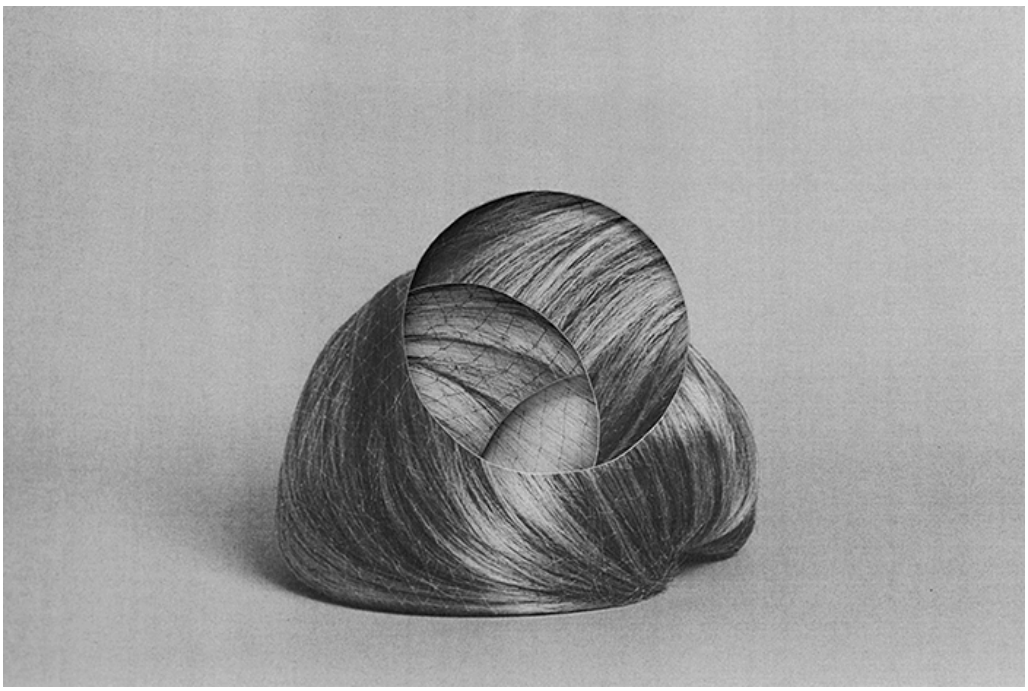
exploring the possibilities afforded by an exploration of the porosity of digital surfaces.

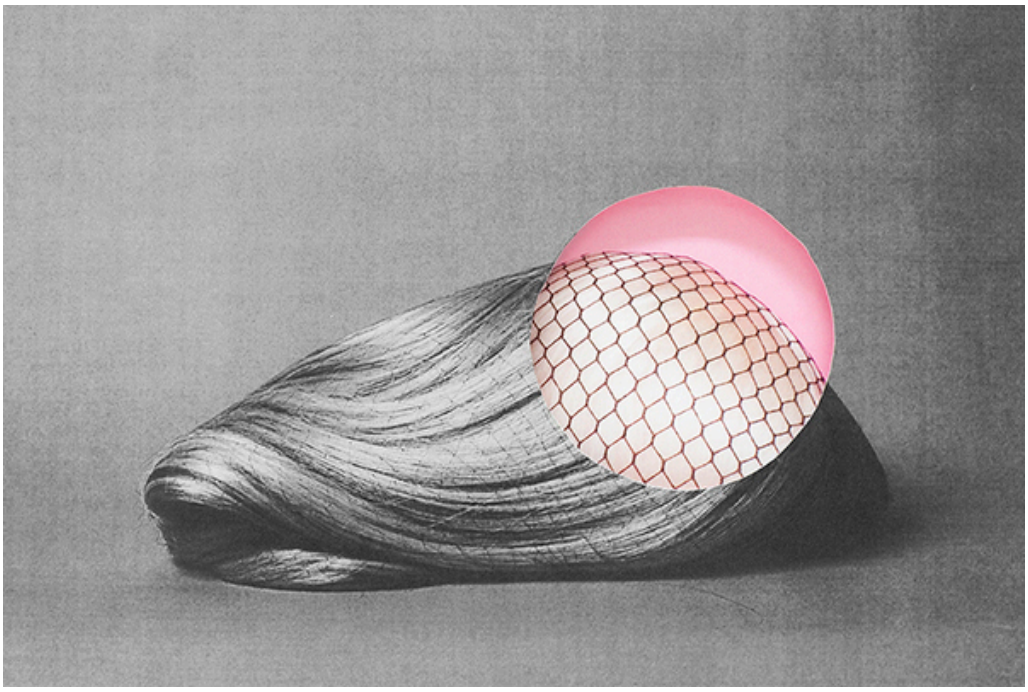
What has emerged from this research is the knowledge that I have positioned photography, not to bring us closer to the wig, rather as a way of exploring the transformative effect photographic practices can have on *our* perception of the wig, *and* the photograph.

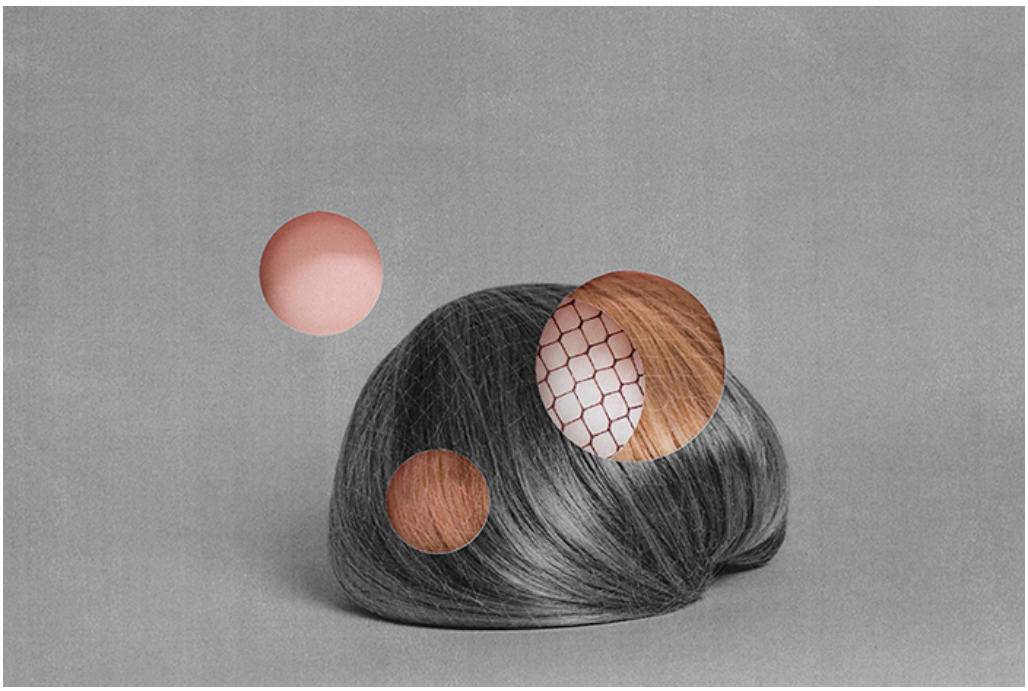
Appendix 1

A selection of images from the ‘Penetralia’ series 2014-2016.









A selection of images from ‘Copy / Cut / Paste’ 2017-2019

Appendix 2

‘Copy / Cut / Paste’ a critical text written by Dr Freya Gowrley (2019) to accompany the exhibition ‘Copy / Cut / Paste’, Leeds Arts University Sept 19 - Jan 20.

Sarah Eyre, Untitled (Copy/Cut/Paste), 2019. Digital photographs on rag paper. Photo by Hamish Irvine

would be around a person’s face, whilst in another, the lines of the cut paper that comprise its layers evoke profiles, rotated and disrupted. As such, the works suggest a portraitive potentiality that is compelling and yet never fully realised; though the wig might be an accessory used within a ritual self-fashioning, this rite is never seemingly fully enacted within these images. Interiority (of wig or wearer), is only suggested, alluded to by the negative space created in the works.

There is something compellingly familiar about these images, which reference both forms of conventional femininity and methods of artistic production with which we have long been familiar. Indeed, with their sophisticated visual qualities, subtly varied colour palette of greys, and refined dark-toned wooden frames, the works initially seem like apt inclusions for the walls of a boardroom, a space often associated with corporate conservatism. Yet these are works that reward careful looking, compensating the viewer’s attention to their multi-layered forms with a rich and provocative meditation on the nature of the thing that they are looking at. *Copy / Cut / Paste* are not merely the modes through which these photographic collages were made; instead they are thoughtful signposts that reflexively relate the works to broader models of artistic production, and which reinforce that these artistic processes are themselves deeply related to means of self-fashioning and display.

Dr Freya Gowrley is Postdoctoral Fellow in History at the University of Derby.

COPY / CUT / PASTE

DR FREYA GOWRLEY

As the title suggests, Sarah Eyre’s exhibition *Copy / Cut / Paste* is a show about process; a dual evocation of the technological present, and the longstanding tradition of collage production past. Of the three titular operations, ‘cut’ is perhaps the most immediately palpable process enacted within the works shown: here representing a perfect marriage of subject and object as defined (and redefined) through a singular reflexive operation. Indeed, the act of cutting characterises the construction of two distinctive cultural modes that occur within Eyre’s works: firstly, as the typifying cultural interaction with the represented subject, that is, the depicted wig styled through the act of cutting, and secondly, as the mode through which the finished art object was made, a gestural echo that ties the work’s various states of being together.

The complex temporalities of these works are likewise shown through their use of an act traditionally thought of in binary opposition to the cut, that of pasting, which

Sarah Eyre, Untitled (Copy/Cut/Paste), 2019. Digital photographs on rag paper. Photo by Hamish Irvine

Sarah Eyre, Untitled (Copy/Cut/Paste), 2019 installation shot. Digital photographs on rag paper. Photo by Hamish Irvine

manifests in the final images through Eyre’s use of carefully overlapping layers. Here the artist has placed print upon print, photograph upon photograph, paper on paper, playing as much with the (represented) object’s body as the negative space it creates. Besides the photographic prints, the works also appear to feature another layered element – a pale checked surface, unconsciously reminiscent of a cleaning cloth. As a surface, the cloth resonates tangibly with ideas of women’s work, and specifically of a feminine labour that might at once refer to women’s artistic practices as much as domestic economy. The inclusion of these materials is thereby particularly reminiscent of the work of germinal collage artists like Hannah Höch, whose work *Weiße Form* (1919) utilised sewing patterns in order to collapse traditional forms of women’s work with her then transgressive participation within the Dada movement.

The work is also characterised by less immediately evident techniques: the ‘copying’ of the exhibition’s title, for example, which here refers to the fact that Eyre photographed her collages in order to make these works. As such, copying is an operation that seeks to complicate and even obfuscate the other two; wherein the cutting and pasting and layering that is so crucial to the appearance of these works, is rendered seamless and flat. Hiding these seams, of course, draws further attention to them. Conversely,

Sarah Eyre, Untitled (Copy/Cut/Paste), 2019 installation shot. Digital photographs on rag paper. Photo by Hamish Irvine

in other pieces these seams are opened up through playful *trompe l’oeil*, where both the surface of the wig and its visual representation appear to be cut away to reveal the negative space in and between its own exterior and interior elements, but this, like the wig itself, is just a suggestion of the thing.

Like cutting, the layering that is inherent to the pieces is, once again, a reflexive gesture towards their feminine subject - the wigs that most often form the basis for the photograph. Worn atop of the head, potentially over the wearer’s own hair, wigs evoke the performance of selfhood that is inherent to many forms of fashion and accessory. Highlighting the artificiality of the act of dressing through their coiffed and styled appearance, wigs reinforce the idea of the body as its own form of assemblage. Like the collaged nature of these works, so too is the body comprised of parts, layers, and coverings; a surface that can be read variously as part or whole. As such, the works are reminiscent of Eyre’s own earlier practice of collecting (and subsequently photographing) discarded hair extensions in the street; pieces of the self, lost and detached from their owners’ bodies. The acquisition of such found objects is in itself powerfully evocative of historical collage and assemblage, which often employed *objet trouvé* amongst their constitutive elements, and can in turn be placed within a broader framework of collecting

Sarah Eyre, Untitled (Copy/Cut/Paste), 2019. Digital photographs on rag paper. Photo by Hamish Irvine

and practice that Eyre’s works clearly participate within.

That the wigs are such, and are not ‘natural’ hair, is reflected through their presentation on wig stands, although at times these are only a suggested presence in the photographs. The images thereby exist on an axis of duplicity, wherein across the works the viewer cannot be perfectly certain if they are looking at a wig, or the abstracted back of a person’s head. References to the absent presence of a portrayed human subject also abound in the works: in one of the images the wig is parted as it

Appendix 3

‘Opening the Wig’ final PhD exhibition, Grosvenor Galley, Manchester Metropolitan University, 16 - 20th March 2020.

Appendix 4

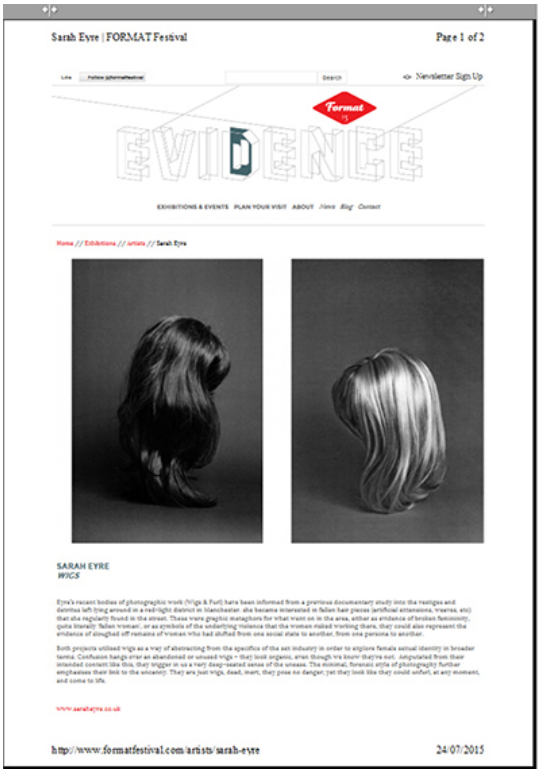
A Selection of exhibitions, publications and outputs published over the duration of the research.

'Copy / Cut / Paste' at Paper Gallery, Manchester, 7th October 2017- 11th November 2017

‘Penetralia’ photographs included in ‘Tracing Paper’, Paper Gallery, Manchester, 6 June - 18 July 2015.

Article published about ‘Penetralia’ in ‘The Skinny’ Magazine 5th June 2017. (https://www.theskinny.co.uk/art/showcase/showcase-sarah-eyre)

‘Wigs’ exhibited at QUAD Derby (and featured in the exhibition catalogue) as part of ’Evidence’ Format. International Photography Festival, Derby, 13th March - 12th April 2015



Sarah Eyre | FORMAT Festival Page 1 of 2

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SARAH EYRE

WIGS

Eyre's recent bodies of photographic work (Wigs & Fur) have been informed from a previous documentary study into the vestiges and detritus left lying around in a red-light district in Manchester. she became interested in fallen hair pieces (artificial extensions, weaves, etc) that she regularly found in the street. These were graphic metaphors for what went on in the area, either as evidence of broken femininity, quite literally 'fallen women', or as symbols of the underlying violence that the women risked working there, they could also represent the evidence of roughed off remains of women who had shifted from one social state to another, from one persona to another.

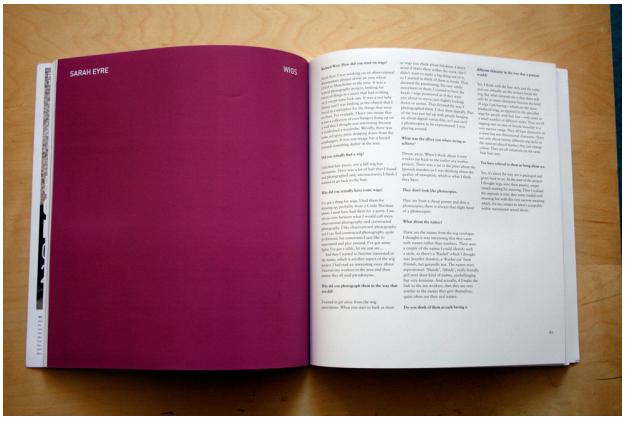
Both projects utilised wigs as a way of abstracting from the specifics of the sex industry in order to explore female sexual identity in broader terms. Confusion hangs over an abandoned or unused wigs - they look organic, even though we know they're not. Amputated from their intended context like this, they trigger in us a very deep-seated sense of the uneasy. The minimal, forensic style of photography further emphasises their link to the uncanny. They are just wigs, dead, inert, they pose no danger, yet they look like they could unfurl, at any moment, and come to life.

www.saraheyre.co.uk

http://www.formatfestival.com/artists/sarah-eyre 24/07/2015

Format 2015 Exhibition Catalogue

Portfolio of ‘Wigs’ published in Source Magazine, April 2014



Appendix 5

Conference Abstracts (Papers delivered but unpublished)

My paper will figuratively and literally open up the wig and explore how my own work and the work of selected contemporary artists make use of the unique and paradoxical qualities of the wig. This will provide a context for a discussion on my own use of wigs within my art practice.

The wig is a symbol, usually undertaking a well understood social, performative or contextual function. Predominantly, it is worn to affirm, reaffirm, exaggerate or disguise some aspect of the wearer's identity. However, women's wigs, have a particular ability to project and exaggerate the feminine and act as a symbol for the female body. My paper will briefly cover some historical context relating to wig wearing and identity then will outline how artists such as Lorna Simpson and Alice Maher have referenced hair and wigs to explore issues around sexuality and gender in their work.

Historically, the material content of the wig has often problematized its intended function. Wigs can reveal anxieties about the body as they challenge what we regard

as the boundary between the body and an object, and consequently the self and non-self. This is further complicated by the knowledge that the wig is made from materials that have come from other bodies. Wigs, especially when disembodied, or otherwise out of context, have an abject or an animal quality to them. I will examine these themes through the context of the work of Emma Hart, Margarita Gluzberg and Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir.

Finally I'll discuss two bodies of photographic work I have made about wigs. 'Wigs' (2012-13) explores the narrative possibilities of the posed wig by hinting at the absent bodies suggested by the wig. 'Penetralia' (2015) explores the suggestive possibilities of the wig in its detached and folded state. The word 'penetralia' means the inner-most recesses of a structure. The title is suggestive and alludes to the link between hair, wigs and sex, as well as having an association with the act of penetrating, and refers to my desire to literally and metaphorically shine a light into the recesses of the wig.

Photography and Lived Experience Symposium

14th June 2019

School of Art, Design and Architecture

University of Huddersfield

Location: RHG/11

Map: https://www.hud.ac.uk/media/assets/document/maps/CampusMap.pdf

Title: Opening up the Wig

My practice-based research is situated within a 'New Materialist' framework and uses photography to explore the notion that inanimate objects such as women's wigs have a degree of agency that is more than their effect on the human body.

Wigs are particularly fascinating because they don't quite fit in to usual object categories. They play a very particular social and performative function, which is to affirm, exaggerate or disguise some aspect of the wearer's identity, or project a new one. They can reveal anxieties around the boundaries between the self and the outside world, as the knowledge that they are often made from real human hair raises anxieties around 'contamination', that threaten the otherwise clearly defined social and physical boundaries we create around our bodies.

This paper discuss how I use photography to ‘open up’ this complex object to demonstrate that we have a relationship with wigs that cannot be exhausted just though their conventional functions. In doing so I argue that the camera too can be an active agent, and I have developed a method of using the camera to look with the wig (as opposed to at). This dynamic look takes the notion that photography can be stretched and re-shaped, to blur the boundaries between photographer, wig, photographic object and image surface.

This enables new information about wigs to be explored, which in turn leads to an expanded consideration of how we engage with them and make them meaningful.

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List of Figures